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ABSTRACT

This report documents, in case study format, eight workplace literacy programs in Canada. Introductory materials highlight conclusions and discuss reasons for undertaking the project to document the Canadian experience in basic skills training from the perspective of the employer and employee and program design. Each case study or program profile describes the major factors involved in developing and sustaining basic skills training under the following categories: a program sketch, company background, human resource policy and issues, program description, services and training delivered, decision making about the program, impact of the program, barriers to implementation, policy influences, and advice to others planning a similar program. The following section discusses factors that lead to success in workplace education programs: broader perspective of education and learning, combined commitment, dynamic organizational structures, innovative programs, marketing and recruitment, meaningful support services, and funding resources. The final section summarizes advice to other companies planning similar programs under six major thoughts for consideration: a program grounded in a philosophy of practice, being responsible and responsive, participation and partnerships, communication and trust, taking the risk, and supportive services. The following programs are profiled: (1) Skills Enrichment Program--Ottawa General Hospital; (2) WEST (Workers Education for Skills Training) Program--Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; (3) Catalina Workplace Education Program--Fishery Products International; (4) Learning in the Workplace Program--Canadian Pacific Express and Transport; (5) Basic Skills Upgrading Program--SkillPlan; (6) Workplace Education Program--Dominion Bridge; (7) Basic Skills Education Program--Sucre Lantic; and (8) SeaGull Pewter and SilverSmith Ltd. Contains 44 references. (YLB)

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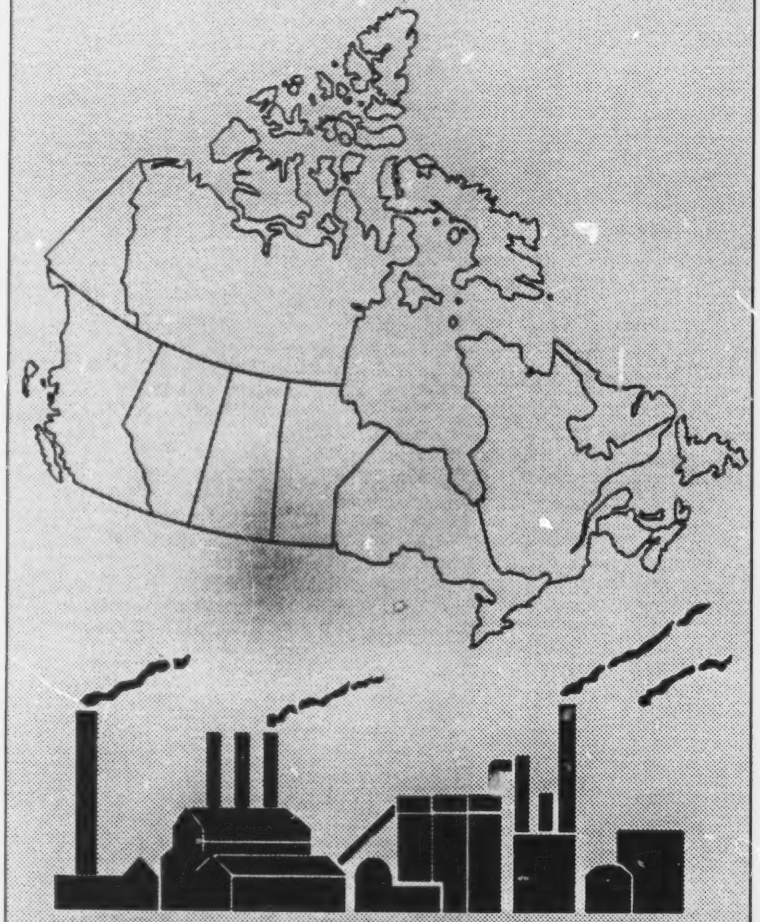
Narrowing the Skills Gap: Workplace Literacy Programs In Canada



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FINAL REPORT

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March 1993

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The Project at a Glance

The area of workplace literacy or basic skills training has now been developing for a couple of years in Canada. However, there still exists no long term policies which place this activity in centre stage along with the larger training debate. One of the reasons for this lack of attention seems to relate to the fact that there is little information to draw upon as to what has worked and not worked and why in program delivery.

This project sought to find some of the answers and connections to these questions. Eight workplace literacy programs and their various participants across the country were selected to describe all of the major events and factors that are involved in developing and sustaining basic skills training. By talking with the employers and employees who were involved in these programs, a clearer sense of what the issues, concerns and advantages of worker education programs emerged.

In some detail, each of the eight case study write-ups describe the background of the company, the human resource issues, the workplace literacy services and training delivered, how decisions were made, impacts, barriers, policy influences, success factors and advice. Each case study is a story of a particular work environment and the unique circumstances that have enabled it to offer a quality worker education program.

Two key findings that are illustrated in the next couple of pages are program success factors and advice to others. At a glance, each program had a formula for success and common across all programs were the following factors: a broader perspective of education and learning, a combined commitment, dynamic organizational structures, innovative program components, marketing and recruitment, meaningful support services and funding resources.

At a glance, each group of participants had some definite advice to give to other companies planning similar programs and this could be summarized under six major thoughts for consideration: a program grounded in a philosophy of practice, being responsible and responsive, participation and partnerships, communication and trust, taking the risk, supporting services.

Factors Contributing to Program Success

Ottawa General Hospital
- Commitment of Organization
- Government Incentive Grants
- Comprehensive Curriculum
- Marketing

Saskatchewan Wheat Pool
- Pilot Project Funding
- Dedicated Organizers
- Centralized Co-ordination
- Work Unit Support

Canadian Pacific Express & Transport
- Commitment to Employee Training
- Curriculum
- Encouragement to Participate

Catalina Workplace Education Program
- Learning Action Committee
- Government Partnership Funding
- Stakeholders Support
- Self-Paced Curriculum

Factors Contributing to Program Success

British Columbia Construction Industry SkillPlan

- Joint Partnership of Industry Labour, Education and Government
- Long Range Planning
- Innovative Use of Technology

Sucre Lantic

- Leadership of Quebec Federation of Labour
- Federal and Provincial Funding
- Sensitive Approach to Recruitement
- Support from Management

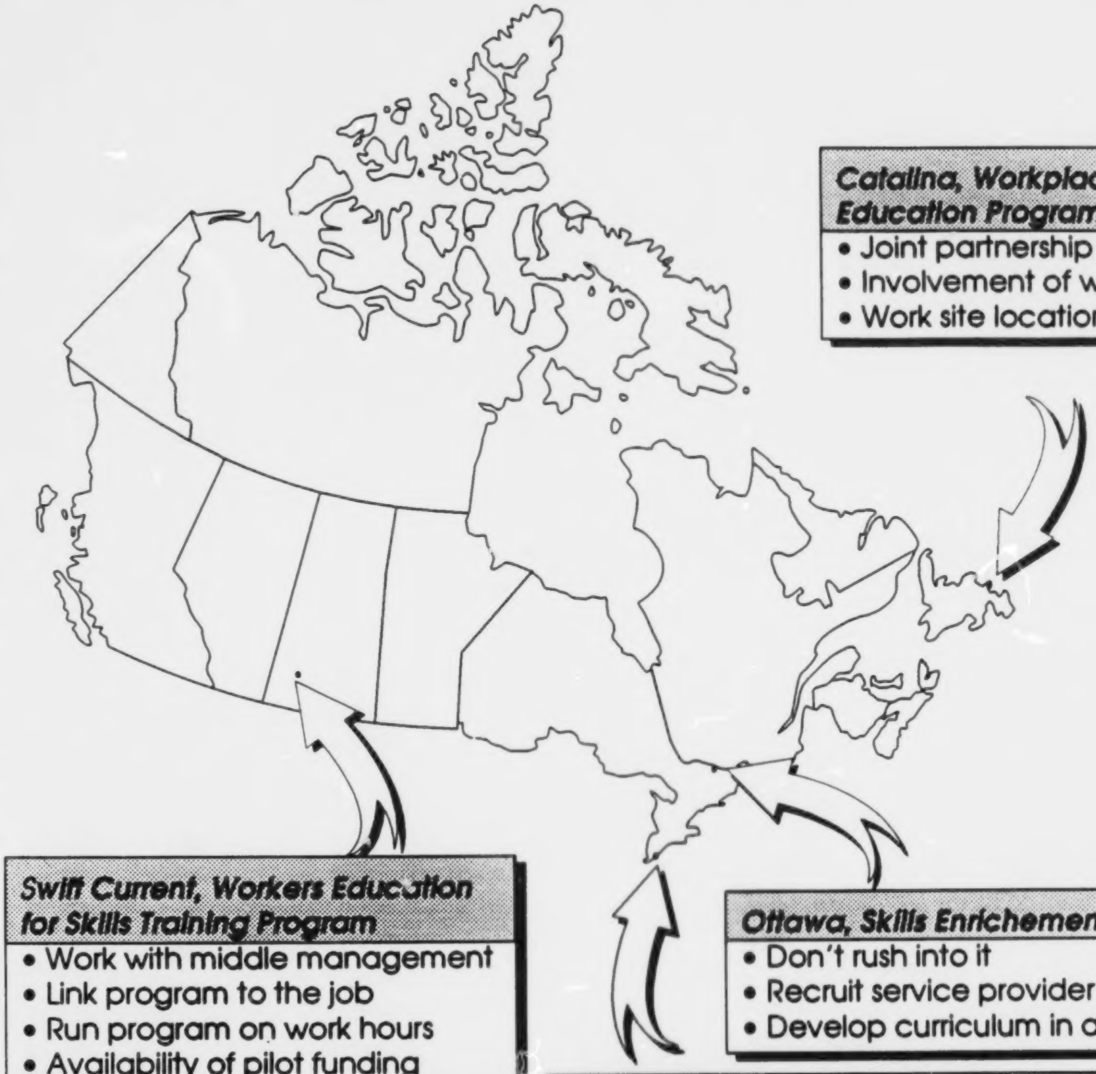
Seagull Pewter & Silversmiths

- Management Support
- Nova Scotia Department of Education
- Customized Curriculum

Dominion Bridge

- Leadership from Provincial Literacy Office
- Availability of Experts in Vocational Education
- National Literacy Secretariat as Catalyst
- Awareness of Linkage Between Competitiveness and Skills Upgrading

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program



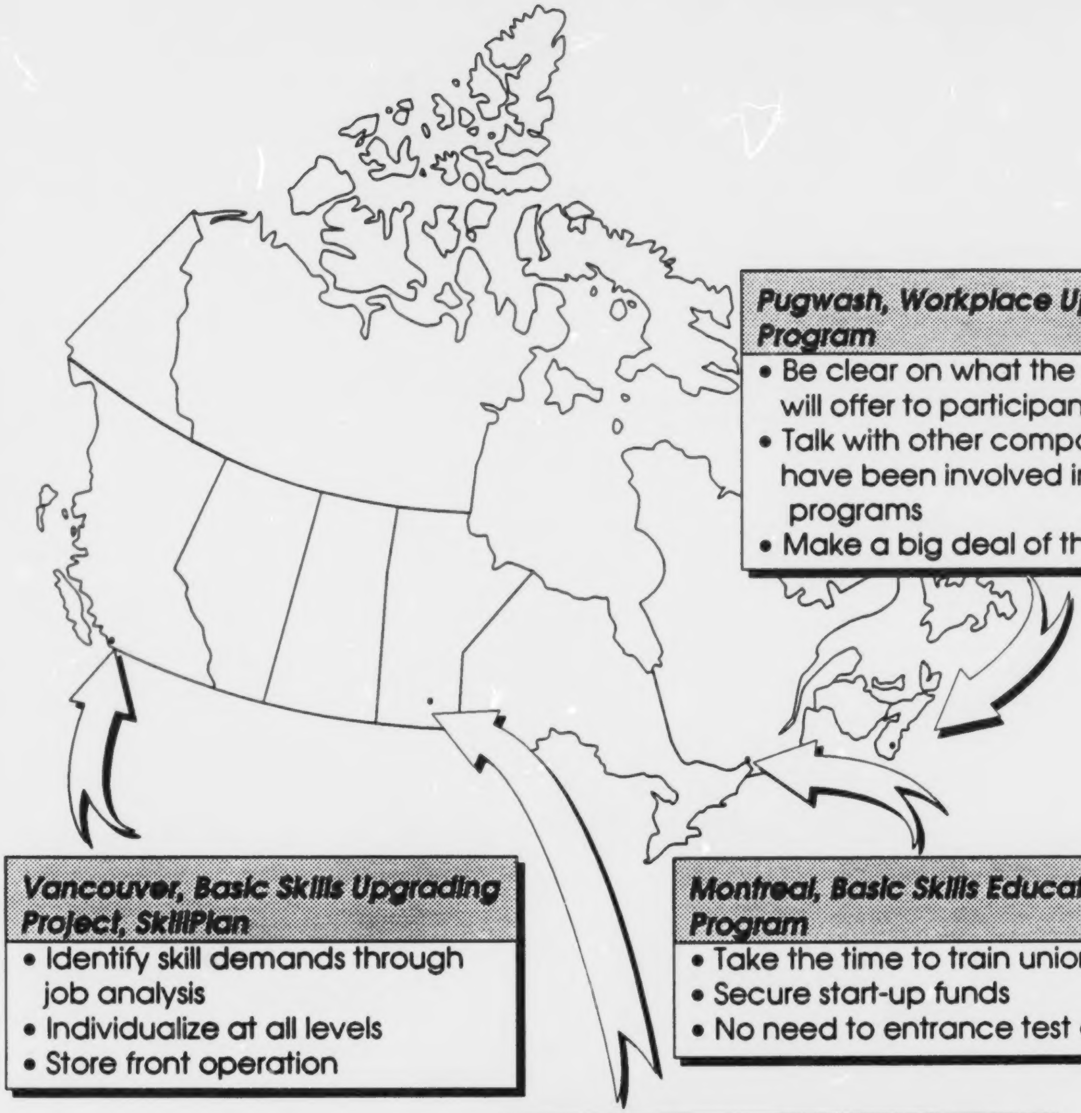
Catalina, Workplace Education Program
- Joint partnership funding
- Involvement of workers
- Work site location

Swift Current, Workers Education for Skills Training Program
- Work with middle management
- Link program to the job
- Run program on work hours
- Availability of pilot funding

Ottawa, Skills Enrichement Program
- Don't rush into it
- Recruit service provider carefully
- Develop curriculum in advance

Toronto, Learning in the Workplace Program
- Foster a learning culture
- Employee input
- Well matched tutors and learners

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program



Pugwash, Workplace Upgrading Program
- Be clear on what the program will offer to participants
- Talk with other companies which have been involved in such programs
- Make a big deal of the program

Vancouver, Basic Skills Upgrading Project, SkillPlan
- Identify skill demands through job analysis
- Individualize at all levels
- Store front operation

Montreal, Basic Skills Education Program
- Take the time to train union leaders
- Secure start-up funds
- No need to entrance test employees

Winnipeg Basic Education in the Workplace
- Be responsive to industry schedules
- Development process is one of experimentation
- Collaboration of management and labour

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Introduction

Workforce literacy is a term that has been receiving considerable attention recently in Canada. Sometimes referred to as the basic skills needed to function effectively in the economy, it has become a concern for human resource executives, union leaders, and education and training managers in private and public organizations. As suggested by the term, it pertains to the improvement of literacy skills needed in the workplace. Due to an era of new technologies, the relaxation of world trade restrictions and the globization of world markets, the workplace now requires a different type of labour force than in the past. As a result, this new phenomenon called the job skills gap now requires a more concerted effort by all stakeholders to improve productivity and the quality of life at the workplace through improved basic skills for employees.

In response, new training strategies such as workplace literacy programs have been introduced as opportunities to learn the necessary skills required for fuller participation in work life. As with every evolving field, there are the accompanying problems. According to Johnston (1991), there are only 100 workplace literacy programs or projects across Canada. Many people who work in this field believe that this is an inadequate response to an increasing training need. Generally,most initiatives to set up basic skills training have come primarily from unions, school boards and community colleges. These projects and programs are largely funded through the National Literacy Secretariat or through provincial government incentive grants and are commonly regarded as being at the forefront in the field. Although businesses are showing signs of interest in this training activity, some employers seem to take initiatives only when confronted with a crisis that has revealed a lack of basic skills in their workforce.

How the Project Got Started

During the past year at a number of literacy conferences, institutes, and workshops, people in the literacy field have felt that business, industry, labour, and education sectors have not given workplace literacy a high enough priority or embarked on long term policies. This may be due to the fact that the elements of partnerships and collaboration have not been fully understood and secondly there is a paucity of information to draw from as to what has worked and not worked and why in program delivery.

It was within this frame that a group of experts from ABC Canada, the Canadian Federation of Labour, the Centre for Literacy, the University of Ottawa and Medicine Hat College developed an action plan to document the Canadian experience in basic skills training from a variety of programs that have been in operation for some time. Working in an advisory capacity, this group was interested in the issues, concerns and advantages of basic skills training from the perspective of the employers and the employees. Questions such as what triggered the need for a program? what were the conditions that allowed a strategy to develop into a workplace intervention? what has been the impact of the program on different stakeholders? required further discussion.

The purpose of this project, therefore, is to report, in case study format, on some of the existing workplace literacy programs in each of the major regions of Canada.

After much consultation eight workplace education programs were identified based on the following criteria: region, program longevity, program innovation, program leadership and program accountability. It is interesting to note that although these eight programs have had different starting dates, each one has evolved over time according to a unique set of circumstances and are currently providing services. The eight case studies or program profiles in this report will describe all of the major factors or events that are involved in developing and sustaining basic skills training. Each program profile describes this information under the following categories:

- A Program Sketch
- Company Background

- Human Resource Policy and Issues
- Program Description
- Services and Training Delivered
- Decision Making About the Program
- Impact of the Program
- Barriers to Implementation and
- Policy Influences

In addition, a summary of the factors that contributed to the success of the program and advice to others planning a similar program concludes each profile. The project report is intended to serve as a catalyst for managers, unions, trainers and other service providers who are interested in either starting up or further developing a workplace education program.

Reasons for Undertaking the Project

The move towards providing basic skills training in the workplace is related to a number of emerging realities which are integral to the fabric of our Canadian culture. This project, therefore, is directed in part at examining the relationships between the practice of workforce training and basic skills. The first reality is that a substantial number of individuals in Canada, both employed and unemployed, lack the basic skills to participate fully in the life and work of their communities, to and keep jobs, to function safely and productively on the job, and to retrain for new jobs. However, recent studies have argued convincingly that employers are in an optimal position, both by opportunity and necessity, to upgrade the basic skills for employed individuals. (Conference Board of Canada, 1990; Statistics Canada, 1990; Chang Barker, 1991; Taylor, Lewe and Draper, 1991; The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, 1992).

Connected to this reality is that increasing numbers of jobs require the utilization, generation and manipulation of information. Even in the growing service industry basic skills are critical for individuals. As the very nature of work appears to be changing, the wide range of basic skills needed will be radically different from those required in the past.

The second reality is that the resource base from which Canada has traditionally drawn its wealth is shifting from non-renewable natural resources, which are being depleted, to renewable human resources and knowledge. Experts such as Porter (1991) and Ohmae (1990) point out that this is necessary in order to maintain the current standard of living in Canada, much less compete in the emerging interlinked global economy. The knowledge and skills of the workforce constitute both a resource and a commodity capable of generating information and wealth.

Another dimension of this same reality is that the pool from which to draw employees for the new jobs and new industries is that same pool of individuals employed and/or unemployed today. Employers will not be able to "dump" a group of inadequate workers and hire a new group; the existing group will have to be trained or retrained. Jamieson and O'Mara (1991), Celente and Milton (1991) and others provide descriptions of the emerging workforce that contains increasing diversity in age, ethnicity, and ability; more women and seniors; more individuals comparatively clear undereducated and underskilled.

A third reality is that, through the efforts of labour unions and professional organizations, and reflecting current consumer trends, employees increasingly want to be treated as individuals. This translates into individualized benefit plans, incentive systems and employment circumstances. It necessitates the process of valuing individuals and investing in employees as human capital. As many experts feel opportunities for training may be viewed as a form of recognition or individualized benefit.

Underlying each of these realities is that change is the new constant. The ability to deal with change is directly related to the ability to learn. Thus, lifelong learning has become synonymous with lifelong change. As the federal government's Prosperity Secretariat (1991) and others espouse, without assistance and coaching, many adults fear change [illegible] avoid for[illegible] learning situations. Employers can now play a major [illegible] n advocat [illegible] felong learning and change.

This project, therefore, is founded on some fundamental assumptions about change and learning, basic skills and participation in decision-making, knowledge and power, productivity and prosperity. Basic skills training in the workplace represents more than the simple act of increasing the skill levels of individual workers. Increased skill levels for individuals and groups is integral to ensuring economic stability. Basic academic, communication and thinking skills are the building blocks to the acts of learning, of generating and assimilating knowledge, of adaptation to change, and of global awareness. It is for these reasons that it becomes important to examine how and why a number of employers have launched into the process of developing and sustaining workplace education programs for their employees.

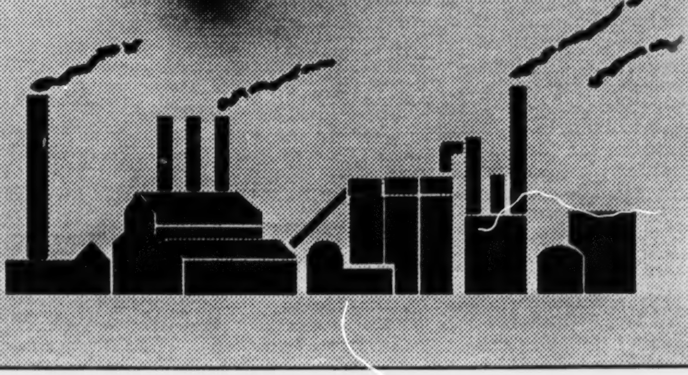
The Design of the Project

The project was designed into three major phases. In phase 1 an advisory committee was established to provide input into the various project activities. Membership on the committee included representatives from the business, labour and education and training sectors. During this phase, the advisory committee assisted in the selection of the eight workplace sites to be documented as well as in the promotion of the project objectives. A review of related literature was also conducted in order to describe the current state of the field and to contextualize the issues and problems now facing this area of specialization. This information also helped to determine some of the major categories of questions that were used when interviewing program participants. As a final activity in this first phase questionnaires were developed based on the well developed interview protocols used by the The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

In phase 2, program visit preparations were initiated. Letters of introduction and follow-up liaison with program co-ordinators in each of the regions were established. This resulted in arrangements for consultations with the various program participants. During the actual field site visits a series of interviews were conducted with the Company Human Resource Manager, the Company Supervisor, the Union Representative, the Workplace Educatiopn Specialist, the Instructor and a focus group of employees for the most part. In some cases interviews were taped. As well, relevant workplace documents were collected for use in writing up the program profile. Following the consultations and program visits, field notes were written, case studies were developed and the information verified by interviewees.

In phase 3, two final reports were developed. A project synopsis for business leaders was written for ABC Canada and a larger report detailing the eight program profiles was submitted to the National Literacy Secretariat.

Ottawa General Hospital



The Skills Enrichment Program

A program sketch...

Skills Enrichment Program
Ottawa General Hospital

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Skills Enrichment Program is an example of a successful workplace education program. Keys to success revolve around the four factors of commitment, curriculum, marketing and funding.

The Ottawa General Hospital is highly **committed** to the training and the quality of the working life of its employees. There exists ongoing supervision from the on-site training co-ordinator in conjunction with consistent monitoring and regular meetings with the service provider. The workforce is an interested and co-operative partner in the learning process and open communication between all levels fosters trust and respect.

The **curriculum** is comprehensive and meets the goals and objectives of the target population. After consulting with management, supervisors, and employees, a tailor made curriculum was developed which includes instructional materials and assignments with a workplace focus. Qualified instructors are recruited who are able to demonstrate flexibility and understanding of the uniqueness of this kind of educational program.

The **marketing** of the program to the employees is extensive. The hospital uses several modes of communication to channel and acknowledge the good work of the Skills Enrichment Program. It is advertised through directors and supervisors as well as newsletters and the annual report. There is a graduation ceremony with a certificate for each successful candidate. The positive support from management coupled with a healthy team approach that acknowledges the opinions of its employees renders this program viable.

It was through government **seed funding** that the Skills Enrichment program got its beginnings. The foundation of the program was built with the assistance of a Workplace Literacy Incentive Grant, a joint federal/provincial funding scheme which was administered by the Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch through employers like the Ottawa General Hospital. This type of funding encouraged the development of the program partnership.

Program Profile

- Services and Materiel Management Division
- Workplace Literacy Incentive Grant
- 2 years of operation
- worker problems - customer relations, oral communication and team work
- 2 semesters a year, 3 hours, four days
- 50% company time, 50% employee time
- community college instructors
- varied methodology
- completion rate 90 - 100%
- increased ability to read in English, communicate with supervisors and problem solve

The Skills Enrichment Program - Ottawa General Hospital

Company Background

The Ottawa General Hospital which is centrally located in Canada's capital is the second oldest hospital in Ontario. A teaching hospital affiliated with the University of Ottawa, it has 490 beds and employs over 2,000 fulltime men and women.

Factors contributing to program success

- **Commitment of the Organization**
- **Comprehensive Curriculum**
- **Marketing Strategy**
- **Government Incentive Grants**

The workplace education program at the Ottawa General Hospital entitled the "Skills Enrichment Program" was implemented in September of 1991. It was specifically designed to meet the needs of the Services and Materiel Management Division (SMM) of the hospital. There are over 450 employees in this division with a high francophone population of approximately 90 %.

Job classifications within the SMM Unit largely include management, clerical and administrative support and production. While the skills required to perform the work in this division vary, it is apparent some workers have experienced difficulty in the areas of reading, writing, communication, individual motivation, team work and effective problem solving and decision making.

Human Resource Policy and Issues

At the Services and Materiel Management Division there is very low turnover of staff with a decrease over the past five years. The majority of workers have been there for over a ten year period of time. Downsizing has resulted in a loss of 35-40 employees over the last year.

Positions within this division are usually filled internally with priority given to current employees. Recruiting and firing are the responsibilities of directors, managers, and supervisors in consultation with the Human Resources Department.

Training and educational opportunities exist including on the job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off site training or education, and in-house seminars. Fringe benefits include health, life and disability insurance, pensions, vacation and holidays and parental leave.

Although there exists an informal pool of workers ready for advancement, the SMM division of the Ottawa General Hospital does have employees whose skills are too low to make them promotable. Qualifications in short supply involve reading and writing skills from management down to workers. As the hospital is a bilingual institution with a high francophone population, skill level could be compromised in order to acquire a bilingual individual. There have also been changes within the organization of work resulting in present day tasks that are more complex and team oriented.

Several problem areas have emerged within the SMM division which are receiving current attention. They involve customer relations, the ability of the workers to read and write in a second language and orally communicate and comprehend, the ability of the employees to function effectively as a team and the ability to solve work related problems. To help address and combat these issues, more training has been introduced. One example is the creation of the Skills Enrichment Program.

Program Description

The Skills Enrichment Program at the Ottawa General Hospital is beginning its second year. The goal of the program is to improve communication skills and customer relations with a more competent, confident and effective workforce. It is also designed to prepare the worker for technological change. The curriculum encompasses English as a second language, reading, writing, oral communication and life skills which is work oriented.

While the program is administered by the Vice President of SMM and a training co-ordinator employed by the hospital, delivery of services is provided by the Career and College Preparation Department of Algonquin College, Ottawa, Ontario.

Constant liaison exists between the program participants, the instructors and the co-ordinator from the Ottawa General Hospital. The course is viewed as a fringe benefit to participants.

Services and Training Delivered

The Skills Enrichment Program is 30 weeks in duration. It is delivered in two semesters of 15 weeks each, September to December and January to April. Students are allowed the option to enrol for a second semester. Classes, which are held on the work site once a week for three hours, are conducted Monday through Thursday from 2 to 5 in the afternoon. There are ten students in each class and participants either volunteer for the course or are recommended to take it. It has been imposed for some managers. Classes meet 50% on company's time and 50% on employee's time.

A higher proportion of the participants are women (75%) with the average age in the mid 30's. Age range extends from mid 20's to 50 and all participants are francophone. When the Skills Enrichment Program began in September of 1991, 36 people participated in the course. This year there are 40 students registered. In addition, the program offers 8 full day sessions for managers and supervisors to a maximum of 15 people.

The following occupations are currently represented in the program - management, clerical and administrative, technical and production. Most of the participants have a high school diploma with less than 10% possessing a community college education.

Delivery of services is provided by the Career and College Preparation Department of Algonquin College. The curriculum is designed around English as a second language, reading and writing skills, spelling, grammar, comprehension, vocabulary development and workplace skills. Instructional materials and assignments are presented in a variety of ways such as written modules, texts, workbooks, and cassettes. There are films, guest speakers, role playing, peer teaching, tutorials and self examination using typical workplace examples, with students working individually in small groups or whole groups.

Teachers are available to facilitate learning, to review and evaluate the worker/learner's performance and to prescribe remediation if necessary. Advising and monitoring of progress is on-going. Wherever possible groups are organized according to second language proficiency with a volunteer to assist weaker students. The program incorporates four levels of learner needs from very basic to advanced, and students are permitted to enrol in four different sessions thus completing four levels in two years. A certificate is issued at the completion of each level.

The start up costs and operating costs of the Skills Enrichment Program were funded 60% by the Ontario Ministry of Education-Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace. An arrangement to cover the funds for the remaining 40% was split between the Ottawa General Hospital (20%) and Algonquin College (20%). The total cost of the program for the first year was $39,655.00.

Decision Making About the Program

In making the decision to implement the Skills Enrichment Program the following factors played a vital role: pressures from customers for higher quality service, the need to reduce errors and increase productivity, the introduction of new technology, the desire to transform the work culture and to see a positive change within labour/management relations and the wish to have training become more readily available to employees.

In developing their program, management from the Services and Materiel Management Division worked in close conjunction with the education specialist from the Career and College Preparation Department of Algonquin College. It was of paramount importance to identify the training needs of the workplace and the learning needs of the workers. An appropriate and comprehensive curriculum had to be developed, a capable instructor recruited and funds secured to support the operation of the program.

Positive support for this undertaking was afforded by management, union, supervisors and employees. At inception, input into the decision making and design of the program was not solicited from employees. However, during implementation, input was received from all levels.

During the implementation phase, the Skills Enrichment Program encountered several obstacles which were surmounted through constant dialogue and positive interfacing by its joint planners. There were differences of opinion regarding the design of the program, the designated classroom was small, there were delays in starting the classes, and the curriculum required total preparation. Rather than receiving 100% funding as they had hoped, the Ottawa General Hospital only received 60%.

By the beginning of the second year the size of the classroom has improved significantly and the course has started on time. The first year instructor after consulting with management, supervisors and employees to establish specific goals and program objectives, has designed a comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs of all the students at each level. The relationship between the Services and Materiel Management Division and Algonquin College is on-going and positive.

Contact with students is frequent and more formal. Meetings occur once a month between the on-site co-ordinator, the instructors, and the participants of the program thereby maintaining open communication, a focused sense of direction and harmony among partners.

Impact of the Program

The Skills Enrichment Program is highly successful. Completion rate of the program is almost 100% based on the fulfilment of the required hours of class attendance and demonstration of task mastery. Informal evaluations of the program have been conducted and all participants have had the opportunity to complete surveys on the teaching of the program. The program successfully fulfills its goals due to the combined efforts of participants, the training co-ordinator and the education provider.

The true success of this program is evidenced by an increased ability of the workers to read in English and to communicate and problem solve more effectively. Retention within the program is good and employees only miss class due to illness or work load. Lateness, when it does occur is addressed. Overall morale and company loyalty has increased and worker interaction and team work have improved in conjunction with the ability of employees to work independently as required. Overall work effort and quality of output is better and customer satisfaction has improved.

Due to the Skills Enrichment Program employees feel more confident and are able to ask questions more freely. They now feel they are a more integral part of what is going on within the work environment. Their self esteem has increased, they feel they are able to advance at work and they now possess some career plans. The participants enjoy the course - the materials used, the pace in the classroom, the varied teaching methods and the instructors from Algonquin College. They also like the idea of their own employer - the Ottawa General Hospital - helping them. They believe the program is administered fairly and that no barriers exist with respect to participation in the program.

There is a strong belief that these kinds of programs are needed, that other workers could benefit from such programs and that more employers should try to provide workplace education programs. This year the following six aspects of the program have received a positive evaluation. They are: content of the program as it applies to the participants, teaching methods, participant learning gains, logistics, participation and workplace impact.

Information regarding program content of the Skills Enrichment Program and participant progress was shared with the hospital body through an April '92 newsletter entitled "Transat". This newsletter afforded the participants an opportunity to express their views about the program and learning gains.

This kind of program has allowed managers and directors responsible for hiring, to look for a different level of employee. It has also helped promote a more open and positive channel of communication between management and employee.

Barriers to Implementation

For any workplace education program to fully reach its operational state, barriers must be identified and appropriately handled. Such is the case with the Skills Enrichment Program of the Ottawa General Hospital.

Initially the specific skills required by the employees of the Services and Materiel Management Division needed clear and concise definition. The meaning of the term "basic skills training" required open and honest discussion and the course content required major modifications and tapering in order to appropriately meet the goals, objectives and needs of the program and its target population.

Management did not want an "off the shelf program". Consequently it was necessary for the education provider to create a unique curriculum for levels one to four encompassing basic skills training with life skills and workplace skills. Only through the identification and constructive problem solving of these barriers was the Skills Enrichment Program able to emerge so successfully.

Policy Influences

In reviewing possible factors that may influence the Ottawa General Hospital to implement or expand a workplace education program, cost effectiveness in combination with financial incentives appear to play vital roles. As well, it is advocated that course work be job integrated, and although there is a strong desire to promote such programs, decisions hinge on technical and financial assistance.

The Ottawa General Hospital might be inclined to adopt further workplace education programs if certain incentives were in place. These might be a) full funding, b) if the costs of training could be used to offset a percentage of the hospital's contribution to the unemployment insurance fund, c) if the hospital could renegotiate their benefit package to trade off the cost of such a program for spending on other fringe benefits, and d) if employees agreed to contribute a percentage of their salary to a workplace training and education fund.

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Skills Enrichment Program is an example of a successful workplace education program. Keys to success revolve around the four factors of committment, curriculum, marketing, and funding.

The Ottawa General Hospital is highly committed to the training and the quality of the working life of its employees. There exists ongoing supervision from the on-site training co-ordinator in conjunction with consistent monitoring and regular meetings with the service provider. The workforce is an interested and co-operative partner in the learning process and open communication between all levels fosters trust and respect.

The curriculum is comprehensive and meets the goals and objectives of the program and the target population. Qualified instructors are recruited by Algonquin College who are able to demonstrate flexibility and understanding of the uniqueness of this kind of educational program. The two 15 week semesters allow participants who cannot attend the full program to leave officially rather than dropout and it also allows new students to enter.

The marketing of this program to employees is extensive. The hospital uses several modes of communication to channel and acknowledge the good work of the Skills Enrichment Program. It is advertised through directors and supervisors as well as newsletters and the annual report. There is a graduation ceremony with a certificate for each successful candidate. The certificate is framable and sports the logos of the two institutions, the Ottawa General Hospital and Algonquin College. The positive support from management coupled with a healthy team approach that acknowledges the opinions of its employees renders this program viable.

It was through government seed funding that the Skills Enrichment Program got its beginnings. The foundation of the program was built with the assistance of a Workplace Literacy Incentive Grant, a joint federal/provincial funding scheme which was administered by the Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch through employers like the Ottawa General Hospital. This type of funding encouraged the development of the program partnership.

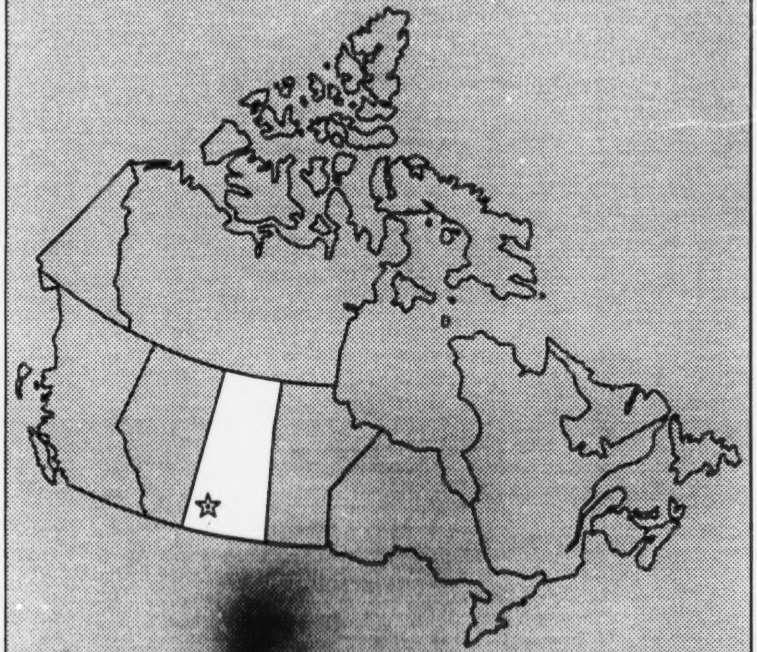
Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

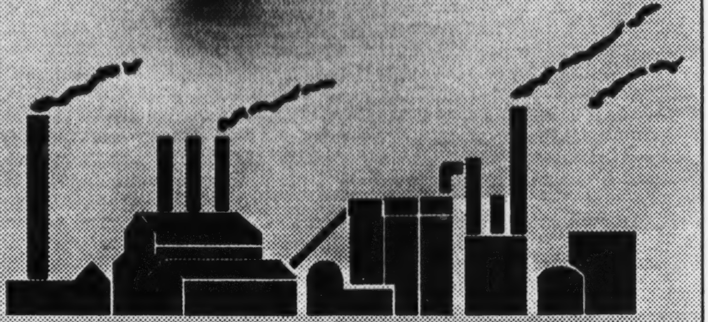
A question asked of all participants in this case study involved specific advice that one would give to other companies or firms who are just starting up a workplace education program. The advice can best be summarized as follows:

- Don't rush into a project on the basis of available funding. Develop a program if the need is present and not as a tool to make oneself more visible.

- Secure the services of an on-site training co-ordinator for the purposes of regular monitoring and open communication between management, employees, and instructors.
- Recruit the service provider very carefully as well as the target population. Voluntary participation is preferred to conscriptive.
- Provide an orientation period to all instructors to review the organization and clearly define at the outset the goals and objectives of the course.
- Secure the curriculum and other program materials well in advance in order to make adaptations. Enlist the services of only qualified instructors.
- Establish and maintain open communication at all times. Build into the schedule regular and on-going evaluations.

Saskatchewan
Wheat
Pool





The
WEST
Program

A program sketch...

The WEST Program
Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

Important factors in initiating the program were the availability of **funding** for a pilot project together with dedicated, charismatic, informed and tenacious individuals as organizers and advocates. It was felt that having the program funded through public dollars made a workplace program more attractive and less costly to the business. Equally important factors in getting started were a systematic needs assessment that convinced the human resources department and subsequently senior management; and an awareness that adult illiteracy is a current social, economic, educational and political issue.

Implementation was facilitated by a highly functional and **collaborative partnership** between the union and management; strong support from union leadership and membership; and continual, collaborative and informed assistance from the National Literacy Secretariat. Some critical operational factors were first, centralized coordination by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour with paid staff which, among other things, increased program credibility in the eyes of employers; second, limited implementation and maintenance costs; third, availability of time, a key cost item; fourth, centralized training and support for course leaders; and finally, a designated facility, specifically the trailer in Swift Current, donated by the employer and used only by the program, which reinforces employee ownership and employer commitment.

A critical factor in recruiting students was the fact that potential participants knew they wouldn't be tested because many students experience test anxiety due to previous negative experiences with the education system. As well, critical to students is the **support within work units** for individual efforts as they contribute to the collective success of the unit.

Program Profile

- grain handling and marketing agency
- Employment Equity Program
- pilot project funding
- 3 years of operation
- need for increased literacy, customer orientation, technological tasks
- programs run throughout the year, once a week for 4 hours
- workers paid for 1/2 of the instruction time
- course leaders are fellow union members trained by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour literacy office
- basic reading, writing, arithmetic, technology readiness, decision making
- achievement of GED, employment mobility, increased basic skill levels & confidence, improved team work, interest in computers

The WEST Program at the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

The Workers Education for Skills Training (WEST) Program at the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP) is a joint effort of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL), the Grain Services Union (GSU), and the SWP Human Resources Department.

Factors contributing to program success

- **Pilot project funding from the National Literacy Secretariat**
- **Dedicated Organizers**
- **Centralized Co-ordination by Saskatchewan Federation of Labour**
- **Support back on the Work Unit**

Company Background

The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, a large organization headquartered in Regina, is predominantly a grain handling and marketing agency. The mission of the Wheat Pool is to be "a diversified agricultural cooperative dedicated to improving the well-being of members through leadership and excellence in meeting customer needs." The Wheat Pool is highly decentralized throughout the province; that is, some employees work at grain storage elevators spread across rural Saskatchewan, and mobile work crews service the storage and transportation facilities. The SWP employs more than 3000 individuals, and there is a wide cross section of employees, from senior executive administration to semi-skilled construction workers.

Within the administrative structure, the Human Resources unit has responsibility for training and education for employees. This unit works with the staff of the Grain Services Union, the union representing all in-scope employees of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, to identify and address the training needs of workers. The Grain Services Union is a member of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour which has initiated and supported workplace education in general and workplace literacy programming, the Workers Education for Skills Training program in particular.

The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, like most large businesses and industries in Canada, is struggling to adapt to change which is both internally and externally driven. The pressures of globalization and intense international competition are forcing the Wheat Pool to adapt in order to survive against increasingly "big" players in the business of marketing grain worldwide. New skills, particularly related to technology, marketing and computers, are required by the existing workforce. One adaptive strategy has been to downsize the workforce and some layoffs have occurred. Another adaptive strategy has been a restructuring which allows for work units to compete internally for projects. Finally, there is an increased need for all levels of employee to be well-informed and customer-oriented.

Human Resource Policy and Issues

Due to restructuring, downsizing and changing skill requirements, extensive human resource development is important to the Wheat Pool. Through a needs assessment, the Human Resources Department became aware that significant numbers of individuals felt that many of their skills were not adequate to meet changing demands, particularly for increased literacy and technological tasks. While the current entry requirement for new employees is Grade 12, some long-term employees have less than that and feel their job security to be somewhat threatened. The Wheat Pool is aware that few new employees will be hired in the immediate future; hence, the existing workforce is the human capital of the organization. As well, the Wheat Pool is aware that it is both unrealistic and impossible to simply discharge the existing workers and rehire individuals with the newly needed, advanced skills. Hence, training opportunities were needed.

At the same time that this need was recognized, the Grain Services Union was approached by the National Literacy Secretariat to consider the development of pilot workplace literacy projects. Senior management of the Wheat Pool was advised of both the need and the opportunity for basic skills training and agreed to the pilot project. The vehicle for implementing the workplace literacy program was the Employment Equity program.

The WEST program addresses two of the major organizational objectives, first, to encourage effective communication throughout the organization and with external agencies; and, second, to provide a workplace environment and human resource policies which attract, motivate and reward employees for excellence in performance.

Program Description

The WEST Program is a creation of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL), funded initially by the National Literacy Secretariat. In 1989-1990 and 1990-1991, SFL received funds to develop the pilot projects and in 1991-1992 they also received a grant from the National Literacy Secretariat for material development. Provincial funding then occurred through the Saskatchewan Department of Education and the Saskatchewan Crown Investments Corporation in 1992-1993. It is patterned after the Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) program in Ontario with adaptations for the rural and massively dispersed nature of employment in Saskatchewan. Endorsed by the Executive Council of the SFL as a benefit to its members, it has had a somewhat sporadic and developmental history, necessitated by the ad hoc funding.

Participants in WEST programs, which are offered in conjunction with many major employers in the province, are unionized workers who have self-selected and volunteered to become involved. Approximately 90 individuals have been or are currently involved in the WEST program through a variety of employers and unions. Ages range from approximately 20 to 60, with the average age being in the mid-30s. The gender of participants is directly related to the type of worksite involved, for example, hospital workers or steel workers; however, participants are mostly male due to the predominantly male-dominated workplaces currently involved with WEST. There are long waiting lists for future programs at a number of sites.

A group of participants is lead by a course leader who is a fellow union member and who is trained and assisted by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour literacy staff. Course leaders are selected from volunteers who have a genuine interest in literacy issues, in helping fellow members, and in facilitating adult learning groups in a non-traditional manner. Participants and course leader(s) work together to design a program that meets the individual needs of the participants; hence, there is no standardized curriculum or instruction methodology. While the focus is essentially basic academic skills, the vehicle might be understanding taxation forms, WHMIS materials, or personal letter writing. Participants create their own goals and evaluate their own progress. For many, the goal is tangible, such as the achievement of a GED diploma, or high school equivalency.

In the Construction and Maintenance work unit of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, approximately 20 individuals have participated in WEST. Typically, classes are held for four hours on Friday mornings, and since the Wheat Pool operates on four ten-hour days, Friday is not a work day. Thus, participants and course leaders use their free time; however, the Wheat [illegible] pays the participants at their regular work rate for half that time and so workers actually gain monetarily. Course leaders volunteer extensive amounts of time for planning and course facilitation; and their employers have, in some cases, contributed by paying for the approximately 2.5 weeks of leadership training through the SFL.

Services and Training Delivered

According to the Human Resources Department of the Wheat Pool, the WEST program is a flexible and adaptable joint venture between union and management. It offers expertise and programming to the organization at a minimal cost, and gives the employees considerable control over their own learning.

The goal of WEST is to provide workers with the opportunity of becoming more self-confident, self-determining and active members of their workplaces, unions, communities and families. Typically, WEST courses are based on worker's needs and interests; workplace and union oriented; focused on learning through discussion and problem solving; and centred on content relevant and applicable to a worker's daily life.

WEST is a trade union education program for workers. It offers basic reading, writing and arithmetic, technology readiness and English as a second language. Although literacy and numeracy skills are central to the program, so are skills in decision making, critical thinking, exploring solutions and applying knowledge to everyday life. According to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, the purpose of WEST is to allow workers the opportunity to develop and strengthen their skills in the manner that best meets their needs, goals and strategies for learning.

Decision Making About the Program

It is a basic tenet of WEST that the program belongs to the workers. To this end, planning is initiated and facilitated by the union representing the workers, and detailed planning is done by the individual training groups scattered across the province. One such group is in Swift Current in the southeast corner of Saskatchewan. Fundamental to the WEST program are the concepts of confidentiality, employee ownership, and trust. Participants self-select and volunteer based on the knowledge that their individual needs and achievements are confidential; thereafter, participation may be negotiated through arrangements with supervisors and management. Planning and provision are the responsibility and right of the workers. The course leaders are peers drawn from the same worksite who are viewed as learning partners rather than teachers.

The role of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour in decision making is to animate the formation of new programs, train and support course leaders, and work with unions and employers to increase awareness of the issue.

Impact of the Program

By all accounts, the WEST program in general and that at the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in particular are successful. Success is gely defined as the achievement of the goals set by students and gram evaluation is largely on a testimonial basis by participants. All of the participants, including the students, the course leaders, management and union leaders, have learned and continue to experience postive impacts.

Positive and intended impacts for student participants include achievement of Graduate Equivalency Diplomas (GED) for several; increased job security and employment mobility; increased self-confidence and self-esteem; and increased basic skill levels.

Positive but unanticipated impacts for students include new interest in other educational topics, especially computers; improved teamwork and work attitude; ability to help children with schoolwork; and increased interest and empowerment in the education of children. To a foreman/participant, success was defined this way.

> "I know how to build stairs, I just grab a hammer and do some measuring and build them. But I couldn't explain to anyone else how to do it until now."

Positive impacts for some course leaders include increased self-esteem and skills; increased recognition by the union and employer; increased interest in continuing education, for example, law school for one; career change, that is, a literacy coordinator position for another; and promotion to management.

Positive impacts for the employer include increased numbers of employees with adequate skills for current and future needs; an interest in further training and involvement; an appreciation for the positive approach of management; an increased competence individually and collectively in work crews.

Barriers to Implementation

Initial problems that were subsequently overcome included inaccurate perceptions and expections, and choices that had to be made.

For example, course leaders initially expected that there would be an instruction manual, but they rapidly realized that such a prescribed course of action precluded individualized, personalized learning. As well, management and leadership initially demanded some form of standardized measurements of achievement, and they came to understand the threatening and inappropriate nature of standardized testing in adult literacy programming. Organizers initially perceived that, as other education systems for both general childhood education and adult basic education had failed these individuals in the past, they should be excluded from involvement in the program; this negative attitude changed as partnerships were developed with those systems.

Employers initially believed that basic skills training was both expensive and just another expense added to expenditure demands, and they were pleasantly surprised at the low cost of the WEST program. Finally, potential students who originally mistrusted fellow students, subsequently came to feel secure. In terms of choices and critical decisions, the seasonal nature of agriculture-related work had to be accommodated. As well, choices had to be made from the variety of models and provision agencies, for example, Cypress Hills Community College, that were available with little empirical evidence to make an informed choice.

Continuing problems in maintaining and enhancing the WEST program include concerns for organizers and potential students. For organizers, continuing problems are presented by the short-term and sporadic nature of funding; the need to define, examine and articulate program success in meaningful terms; the inability to realistically create long-term plans; and geographic dispersion of workers resulting in small numbers of potential participants in a large number of locations

Within the work environment, problems for both potential students and the program organizers are presented by the communication gap between the highly supportive senior management and the highly supportive labour representatives, that is, problems with mid-management who must accommodate changes they aren't in complete agreement with.

An additional problem is the attitude, held by some mid-management, that some employees are getting special treatment at the expense of others. In particular, for students, there is the ongoing problem of limited career advancement opportunities due to downsizing and restructuring of the organization; the loss of learning in those time gaps between programs; the continuing real-life problems of adult learners, for example, sick kids and childcare arrangements; and the shortage of study time for busy, employed adults.

While often there are significant problems for workplace literacy programs, two common problems were not evident here: the scheduling problems inherent in shiftwork, and the negative impact of the term "literacy" and/or "illiteracy." Circumstance and experience combined to eliminate these common detractors to program success.

Policy Influences

Policy issues that relate to the WEST program at the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool were generated by both the union and by management. From the perspective of both the Grain Services Union and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, there were three major policy influences.

First, deficits in basic literacy skills were inhibiting individuals from moving through the union structure and upward in the employment organization. Secondly, as union education is highly dependent on written materials, members were reticent to become involved at worst and experienced significant difficulty at best. Thirdly, workers were being faced with increasing numbers of difficult forms and formal procedures, both union and work-task oriented. Changes in the workplace demanded changing skill levels and types.

Specifically, with regard to literacy, the union policy is that literacy is not the passive absorption of basic academic skills; it is active, that is, necessitating the development and strengthening of individual and collective skills for critical thought and action. For the labour movement, any education program is part of the long term strategy to enhance and empower individual workers and subsequently the union movement.

From the perspective of the employer, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the entire organization was faced with change in order to survive. Three major policy influences were, first, the recognition that organizational and industry-wide change required personnel to use skills at a level far beyond the basics of literacy, numeracy and technological capability; secondly, the awareness that organizational restructuring with increased decentralization necessitated increased decision-making by all levels of personnel; and, finally, the knowledge that there are rapidly increasing amounts of information to be dealt with at all levels.

Specifically with regard to implementation of the WEST program, a policy issue related to funding surfaced; the question of whether the program is an expense or an investment. The Wheat Pool concluded that, while the monetary costs/benefits were not a motivating factor, it was believed that in the long term, human resource development programs affect the "bottom line" positively. As well, the WEST program is considered to be a bridge, for some workers, into more formal teaching situations. Clearly, this is a long term policy issue for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Factors Contributing to Success

Interviews with individuals involved with the WEST program of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, in Swift Current and Regina, and with union individuals and educators, revealed the following factors contributing to success. Important factors in initiating the program were the availability of funding for a pilot project together with dedicated, charismatic, informed and tenacious individuals as organizers and advocates. It was felt that having the deliverer funded through public dollars made a workplace program more attractive and less costly to the business. Equally important factors in getting started were a systematic needs assessment that convinced the Human Resources Department and subsequently senior management; and an awareness that adult illiteracy is a current social, economic, educational and political issue. Implementation was facilitated by a highly functional and collaborative partnership between the union and management; strong support from union leadership and membership; and continual, collaborative and informed assistance from the National Literacy Secretariat.

Some critical operational factors were first, centralized coordination by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour with paid staff which, among other things, increased program credibility in the eyes of employers; second, limited implementation and maintenance costs; third, availability of time, a key cost item; fourth, centralized training and support for course leaders; and finally, a designated facility, specifically the trailer in Swift Current, donated by the employer and used only by the program, which reinforces employee ownership and employer commitment.

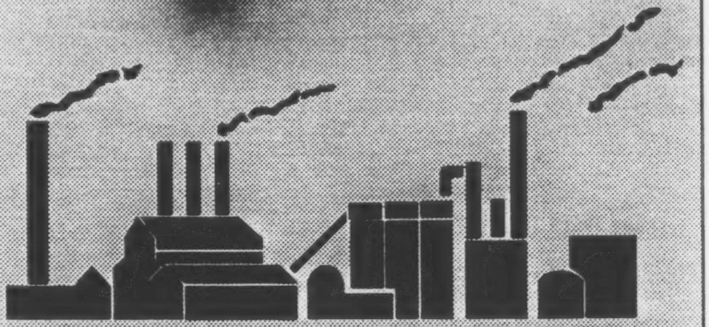
Critical factors in recruiting students were the fact that potential participants knew they wouldn't be tested because many students experience test anxiety due to previous negative experiences with the education system. As well, critical to students is the support within work units for individual efforts as they contribute to the collective success of the unit; learning groups made up solely of fellow workers already known to each other; the notion that this is the first "real chance" to address a lifelong dream of high school completion; financial assistance from the employer; and the use of personally relevant learning materials.

A final success factor is the fact that the workers did not have to initiate or demand the program, that is, that the union and management worked together to get it going. Clearly, this program was exemplary as a pilot project, one that others can learn from.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

The participants in this program were eager to give advice to others planning similar programs. In particular, they emphasized the necessity to make any effort necessary to get started, to "Stop talking and just do it!" They were confident that "you really can't do anything all that wrong if you really care about upgrading the skills of workers." Some explicit advice was to work extensively with the mid-management who must implement plans that they haven't necessarily been involved in creating. In addition, some people know they need help but they won't go to an outside agency; here, the employer has an opportunity to help people in a unique way. The Wheat Pool as an employer participant noted that successful programs are those that are directly linked to the workplace, focusing on the skills that learners are asked to use on the job. From the perspective of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, the ideal arrangement for WEST programs is that they are run totally during work hours. In summation, the partnership arrangement between union and management with outside expertise and available seed funding is a good one.

Fishery Products International



The Catalina Workplace Education Program

A program sketch...

The Catalina Workplace Education Program
Fishery Products International

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

One of the key ingredients associated with the success of the Catalina Workplace Education Program was the establishment of a **Learning Action Committee**. This committee was struck very early in the program planning process and met on a regular basis. Membership on the committee included all the major stakeholders - from workers to senior management. By involving representatives from the company's key groups, a sense of ownership for the project was created. As well this visible committee was able to tackle many of the problems encountered during the start-up phase.

A second factor contributing to the success of the program was the endorsement of senior **management** coupled with **union** and **worker involvement**. At different stages of the program workers were asked to voice their opinion in such activities as participating in the needs assessment, in establishing the goals of the program and in completing surveys about program satisfaction. In addition, the union played a constructive role with the employer and college in setting up an appropriate educational program. As well, the financial contribution of the **National Literacy Secretariat** and the provincial **Department of Education** enabled the program to be sustained through the first stage of membership acceptance.

Another factor which help make this a viable program was the **self-paced job-related approach** to learning. By using plant material for classroom resources, workers have a much better understanding of what the Catalina plant is all about and the product it is trying to produce. The fact that the program was offered at the work site and used tutors to help deliver the services helped overcome barriers related to drop-out.

Program Profile

- fish processing plant
- management union partnerships
- Learning Action Committee
- 2 1/2 years of operation
- difficulty in reading, communicating with supervisors, math, and problem solving
- 3-4 times a week
- after work on employee time
- Eastern Community College
- self paced, interactive classes, individual tutors
- increased ability to read, write and compute, problem solve, worker safety, quality of team work

The Catalina Workplace Education Program - Fishery Products International

Company Background

Factors contributing to program success

- **Learning Action Committee**
- **Visible Support from Stakeholders**
- **Government partnership funding**
- **Self-Paced Curriculum**

Established in 1984, the Fishery Products International (FPI) is a major corporation employing six thousand workers in thirteen processing plants throughout Newfoundland. In 1991, it received the Canada Export Award. At the Catalina plant where the workplace education program was initiated in 1989, there are one thousand workers. At the time when this information was collected, the plant had recently been "moth balled" and no re-opening date scheduled as of yet. Prior to this critical event, the percentage of men and women working in the company was about the same. In this company both the production and clerical workers are employed only on a part time or seasonal basis.

Although the company anticipates a growth posture with an increase in sales and expanded markets over the next few years, there has been recent lay-offs. In the particular unit where the workplace education program is housed, there are approximately five hundred workers organized into teams on two shifts.

The management level consider the majority of workers to have difficulty with math skills while only some have reading difficulties. Communicating with supervisors and problem-solving skills were also mentioned by administration as an area of concern.

Human Resource Policy

Prior to plant closure circumstances, the company gave priority to current employees when hiring for above entry level positions with training following promotion. The union, which has represented the workers even prior to 1984, plays a major role in decisions about internal promotion, lay-offs, and down sizing. However, lack of education or skills is perceived by employees as a barrier to internal promotion. Comparing with similar employers in the area, this company's wages are higher.

In recent years, the nature of training and education has expanded to include: on the job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off-site training, and in-house seminars. Through the collective agreement, such fringe benefits as profit sharing, tuition reimbursement, and parental leave complement the other standard types of benefits such as vacation and health, life and disability insurances.

In terms of human resource issues, labour costs, worker management relations, and an increase in the quality of the product are considered strengths of the company's culture. However, problems were encountered in employee abstenteeism and morale and the ability of workers to read, write, communicate orally and solve math problems such as those with production sheets. Throughout the company, a shortage of skills can be attributed to four major reasons: changes in the organization, certification requirements, new technology, and problems with the education system. Increasing training and enhancing the appeal of jobs have helped to cope with these shortages.

Program Description

The Catalina Program, which has been in operation for the last two and half years, is administered by the Human Resource Manager, the Training Coordinator, and a Learning Action Committee. Membership on this committee involves the top manager, the human resource manager, an outside consultant, a union representative, an employee representative, and program participants. Eastern Community College has been involved in the program which can be described as a job integrated service with some aspects of a customized curriculum. Support services such as counselling and tutoring are provided.

Services and Training Delivered

Currently, there are twenty-six participants in the Catalina program, all from the production line unit. Classes meet after work, three or four times a week, on employee time, at the Workplace Education Resource Center. Because most bargaining unit employees are on a bonus system, which means that if a worker surpassed his/her quota, a bonus (money) would be paid to that employee, it was difficult to provide work release time for instruction.

Employees volunteer to participate in the course which uses self-paced workbooks, interactive classes, and individual tutors. Some of the participants have a high school education while others have eighth grade or less. All trainees in the program speak English as a first language. Both start-up and operating costs have been shared by the company and joint partnership funding from the National Literacy Secretariat and the Provincial Department of Education. Based on the current number of participants enrolled in the program, the cost per employee is $2,500.00. No fees are charged by the service provider. The union also contributes indirectly to the cost of the program through collective bargaining as well as providing for technical assistance and space. Since 1988 over $175,000.00 from the joint government partnership has assisted the feasibility work, the initial project and the development of curriculum at the various FPI plant sites.

The curriculum is focussed on the teaching of reading, writing, and math skills. Eastern Community College has been involved in the program working in the areas of needs assessment, liaison, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As well, volunteers from both within and outside the company help deliver the services.

Decision Making About The Program

During the inception stage of the Catalina program, it was the education organization that initiated the contact with the company. At the same time, however, changes in production methods through new technology, increased competition, the transformation of the work organization, and the need to reduce errors and waste also helped reinforce the decision to implement the program. As previously mentioned, the Learning Action Committee was a pivitol mechanism in launching the program and met once a month. Both management and union were on-side, providing input into the decision making process. A priority in the early planning days of the program was the decision to secure government partnership funding to support the service.

As the program developed, the union played a significant role in the pre-testing of participants, the program content, and providing information to employees and management. In addition, there was an open dialogue between the instructor and managers, supervisors, and employees concerning the goals of the program. Although at inception, input in the decision making was not solicited from each employee, they have completed surveys concerning their own satisfaction with the program.

Impact of the Program

In describing the impact of this workplace education program, it is important to note that informal evaluations have been conducted with all interested parties - from the top manager to employees. Overall, there is a perception that the program is fulfilling its goals. Workers, union and management are satisfied with the service. Specifically their is concensus that content, participant learning gains, participation and teaching methods are satisfying aspects of the program. As was stated by one of the interviewees "We are learning as we are going". This comment reflects the expressed need to strengthen the program content by making it more work related.

Although the company has not yet specifically measured the returns of the program, several themes of impact can be described. First, there has been a significant impact on the ability of workers to read, write and compute. While employees rated program impacts such as ability to problem solve, worker safety and quality of team work as only moderate (since they felt they had already possessed these skills) the supervisor and union representative viewed these same impacts as being significant.

Second, as can be expected with a plant in the process of closure, morale is low. However, the workers themselves believe that participation in the program had increased their confidence in work, their self esteem, their career plans and has had a definite impact on their family life. Workers stated that they are learning what they expected to learn and that the current program is improving their ability to apply workplace basic skills in their jobs.

Third, the supervisors, union representative, training coordinator and instructor all affirmed that employees in the program had skill increases in work effort, the ability to use new technologies and the ability to work independently. Despite the current closure circumstances, management was convinced of the value of the service and is planning to continue the program in a modified format.

Barriers to Implementation

Although the workers were generally satisfied with most aspects of the program, they felt that at the outset of the program they could have been encouraged more by the different levels of management and union to participate. As well, since the location of the program has been moved off-site recently, transportation costs are now considered a barrier. At the Catalina plant the major barriers encountered were during the initial phase of the program design. There was a general apprehension as to how to go about launching such a training initiative. Even though a need was identified factors such as potential worker resistance, costs, a lack of infra-structure to deal with the issue, a knowledge of the exact skills required to be taught and the actual arrangements for organizing a basic skills program were concerns. One of the solutions, however, was the establishment of the Learning Action Committee which provided a cooperative means for addressing the barriers.

Policy Influences

In terms of policy influences several areas were noted during the interviews. This company would consider expanding the workplace education program if the course work was totally job integrated. It was also mentioned that collecting evidence from other companies that indicated increased job performance and productivity due to a basic skills program would influence decisions about expanding. Establishing local forums or networks where employers could talk with each other about the contributions and challenges of their programs was also considered an important need. Finally, support was provided for the idea of continuing a grant system to help employers, a tax credit and a workplace training and education fund for employees.

Factors Contributing to the Success of the Program

One of the key ingredients associated with the success of the Catalina workplace education program was the establishment of a Learning Action Committee. This commitee was struck very early in the program planning process and met on a regular basis. Membership on the committee included all the major stakeholders - from workers to senior management. By involving representatives from the company's key groups, a sense of ownership for the project was created. As well, this visible committee was able to tackle many of the problems encountered during the start-up phase.

A second factor contributing to the success of the program was the endorsement of senior management coupled with union and worker involvement. At different stages of the program workers were asked to voice their opinion in such activities as participating in the needs assessment, in establishing the goals of the program and in completing surveys about program satisfaction. In addition, the union played a constructive role with the employer and college in setting up an appropriate educational program. Over the past two and half years of implementation, senior management has also been a constant support in this new training initiative.

As well, providing fuel for the various stages of the program development was the financial contribution of the National Literacy

Secretariat and the provincial Department of Education. With their support, the program was able to be sustained through the difficult first stages of membership acceptance.

Another factor which helped make this a viable program was the self-paced job-related approach to learning. By using plant material for classroom resources, workers have a much better understanding of what the Catalina plant is all about and the product it is trying to produce. The fact that the program was offered at the work site and used tutors to help deliver the services helped overcome barriers related to drop-out.

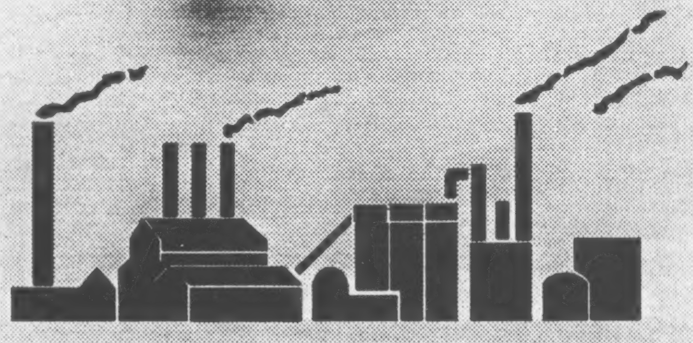
Advice to Others Planning A Similar Programs

Considering the recentness of workplace literacy programs across the country, the Catalina program is in a very good position to offer advice to others based on its two and a half years of experience.

- The involvement of workers in the design, delivery and teaching methodology in crucial.
- Establish a joint partnership among the key players such as employer, union, college as was done through the Learning Action Committee.
- Establish a good track record for start up activities which are funded by government partnership resources.

- Inform workers about the benefit of participating in such a program.
- Choice a suitable location on the work site to deliver this service.

Canadian Pacific Express & Transport



Learning in the Workplace Program

A program sketch...

Learning in the Workplace Program: Canadian Pacific Express and Transport

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Learning in the Workplace Program (LWP) is an example of another successful workplace education program. Factors of success center around co-operation, curriculum and promotion.

Canadian Pacific Express and Transport (CPET) is committed to implementing the LWP as a component of its total quality management initiatives and in so doing are committed to training their employees. There exists ongoing supervision of the program from the Manager of Quality Development in conjunction with monitoring and regular meetings with the site's LWP committee. The CPET workforce is an interested and **co-operative partner** in this learning process.

The **curriculum** seems to meet the collective goals of staff, management and the program. Qualified instructors are recruited from the staff complement, trained and matched with interested learners. Staff have commented that this arrangement allows them to be more comfortable and able to learn effectively.

Promotion of the program has been handled in a number of ways. In the beginning, Frontier College invited all staff participation during their initial needs assessment exercise. The LWP committee located at each work site was responsible for marketing the program in that area. Committee members made a point of speaking with each staff person individually to encourage participation. Staff designed creative posters and hung them strategically throughout the terminal. It was also advertised through supervisors as well as the LWP newsletter.

Program Profile

- total quality management (TQM) approach in 1988
- 18 months of operation
- helping staff integrate TQM initiatives into daily work
- programs run for 3 month intervals, once a week, 1 - 2 hours
- 50% company time, 50% employee time
- Frontier College trained tutors
- site specific materials
- participant completion rate 95% - 100%
- improvements in staff communication, morale, self-directed work, worker safety
- expanding to other occupational groups in the company

Learning In The Workplace Program
Canadian Pacific Express & Transport

Company Background

Factors contributing to program success

- **Commitment to Employee Training**
- **Curriculum Reflecting Goals of Staff and Management**
- **Encouragement to Participate**

Canadian Pacific Express & Transport (CPET) is a division of Canadian Pacific Trucks, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Canadian Pacific Limited. CPET dates back to May 1873 when the Dominion Express Company performed drayage work for the railway. With 62 terminals located throughout Canada and the United States, CPET employs approximately 3400 staff.

In 1988, CPET adopted the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach to running their company. The Learning in the Workplace program (LWP) came shortly after the implementation of TQM and was piloted on 58 employees within the clerical departments of two Toronto terminals.

Job classifications within the clerical departments included managerial, supervisorial and clerical support. While the skills required to perform this work vary, it was apparent the some employees had difficulty with team work and problem solving.

Human Resource Policy and Issues

The company has experienced little turnover with a decrease seen over the past five years. Recent economic pressures have resulted in downsizing activities leading to a loss of approximately 70 employees in the last few years.

Positions are usually filled internally with priority given to current employees. Recruitment is done by supervisors. Some staff commented that although internal advertisements were posted, they felt that decisions regarding candidate selection had already been made. Senior management interviewed, believed that the career ladder within this organization was not clearly defined and the company did not currently have a pool of qualified employees ready for advancement. Furthermore, the skill areas believed to be in short supply included reading, oral communications and math and these problems were attributed to the educational system and changes within the organization.

Training and educational opportunities exist including on- the-job-training, opportunities to learn jobs in other areas, specific internal training sessions, opportunities to take external courses for reimbursement and the current LWP. Fringe benefits include health, life and disability insurance, pensions, vacations and tuition reimbursement.

The personnel issues of most concern to all interviewees at this time included poor employee morale and worker-management relations. In addition, senior management felt that labour costs were also of great concern.

Program Description

The LWP has been in operation for approximately 18 months. Since its beginnings with the clerical departments of two terminals, it has expanded into the Dock and Vehicle Department of the Obico terminal and into the Clerical Support, Finance, Pricing, Human Resources, Line Hall Dispatch and Information Systems Departments at the head office. The specific goals of the program include helping staff to integrate TQM initiatives into their daily work and cope with technological change. The curriculum, determined by tutors and learners, encompasses English as a second language (ESL), other languages, reading, writing, math, computer skills and specific workplace tasks skills such as tracking short shipments.

Each work site, has its own committee consisting of program participants and an outside consultant who are responsible for program administration. The LWP is delivered by CPET tutors currently trained by Frontier College.

Services and Training Delivered

The LWP runs for three months at a time. Classes are held on the work site and scheduling arrangements are made between the tutor and learner(s). Sessions occur once per week and last for approximately one hour. Generally there are no more than a few learners assigned to each tutor. Classes meet 50% on company's time and 50% on employee's time.

A higher proportion of participants are male (70%) with an age range extending from 20 to 60 years. Of the departments currently receiving the LWP, the Dock and Vehicles Department has up to 60% of its staff speaking another language other than English. When the LWP was piloted in the 1990, 58 people participated in the course. Currently there are 125 people in this session made up by the Clerical and Docks and Vehicles Departments at the Obico terminal and the Clerical Support, Finance, Pricing, Human Resources, Line Hall Dispatch and Information Systems Departments at the head office.

The occupations represented in the program include management, supervisorial, clerical, technical and labourers. Within this group, the formal education levels obtained ranged from eighth grade or less to some college education.

Frontier College provides the initial training for peer tutoring. Their sessions include instruction on adult education, basic techniques in teaching, developing learning materials and evaluation. The curriculum is designed around the identified needs of the learner. Instructional materials and assignments are site specific and presented in variety of ways depending on the collective decisions made by the tutor and learner.

Tutors are responsible for facilitating learning, reviewing and evaluating the learner's progress and when applicable, making further recommendations for learning. Monitoring of learner progress is on-going. Learners all receive a certificate of participation once their three month experience is complete.

CPET would not provide specific information on program costs but indicated that they take care of the costs and stated that the start up, operating costs and fees charged by Frontier College were very reasonable. CPET also stated that such a program combined with TQM initiatives would make the company more efficient and save money in the long run and therefore believed that the cost of the program was very small in comparison.

Decision Making About the Program

In making the decision to implement the LWP, the following factors played a vital role: decision to transform the work organization and corporate culture, a change in labour/management relations, the need to reduce errors and waste and the introduction of new technology.

In developing their program, CPET worked closely with Frontier College's Manager of LWP [illegible] a Project Assistant in completing a needs assessment of the company to identify the training needs of the workplace and learning needs of the staff.

Positive support for this undertaking was afforded by management, union, supervisors and employees. From the beginning, input into the design of the program was solicited by management, the union and staff.

During the implementation phase, the LWP encountered a few obstacles. CPET was in the middle of restructuring activities resulting in staff layoffs, very poor morale and unexpected program delays. The initial pilot was also only done with clerical staff. Other department groups wanted the opportunity to participate in this program initially and were not permitted. Interest expressed by other departments was seen as a positive indicator for future program expansion.

Impact of the Program

The LWP is very successful. Participant completion rate per three month session at the Obico terminal is about 90%. Completion rates at the head office are expected to be similar. In general, those interviewed in this case study were quite satisfied with the LWP content, participant learning gains, participation, teaching methods, logistics and the workplace impacts. The supervisor interviewed saw significant improvements in the ability of staff to communicate, morale, teamwork and the use of new technology. The union representative interviewed saw significant improvements in worker safety and moderate improvements in areas such as reading, communications, problem solving, team work and self directed work.

The workplace education specialist stated that LWP was making a positive impact on employee communications, problem solving, using new technologies, improving morale and the participant's understanding of company operations. Program participants interviewed stated that they really enjoyed this type of education and felt that it increased their self confidence and esteem, helped them to learn about other jobs and staff outside their departments and gave them a better sense of company goals. Furthermore, participants believed that the LWP enabled them to communicate better with other staff, participate more effectively on teams, ask better questions, work independently and basically, deliver better service. Overall, the LWP has had a very positive impact within the CPET's workplace.

Barriers to Implementation

In order for workplace education programs to continue to develop and expand, barriers and problems must be identified and rectified. Some of the issues identified for this workplace include time release problems, staff discomfort with revealing literacy concerns, certain supervisors who did not actively promote the program and recruiting tutors with those specific skills identified by learners, for example, french language.

Policy Influences

CPET is hoping to expand the LWP across the company. In order to do this, the course work has to be job related and integrated. CPET would be strongly influenced to expand if they received technical assistance from employer associations and local community colleges. Acceptable providers of such a program included in-house staff, private consultants and their preferred choice of a private non-profit organization. Other areas that would strongly influence CPET to expand would include a provincial tax credit, training to be offset by 2% of the company's contribution, a larger unemployment insurance reduction such as 25%, grants to reduce costs and keeping employees long enough to recover the investment in training.

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The LWP is an example of a successful workplace education program. Commitment, curriculum and marketing are the factors that contribute to the success of the program.

CPET is committed to implementing the LWP as a component of its TQM initiatives and in so doing are committed to training their employees. There exists ongoing supervision of the program from the Manager of Quality Development in conjunction with monitoring and regular meetings with the site's LWP committee. The CPET workforce is an interested and co-operative partner in this learning process.

Staff, management and the LWP all provide input into the content of the curriculum and, therefore, the program appears to satisfy collective goals. Qualified instructors are recruited from the staff complement, trained and matched with interested learners. Staff have commented that this arrangement allows them to be more comfortable and able to learn effectively.

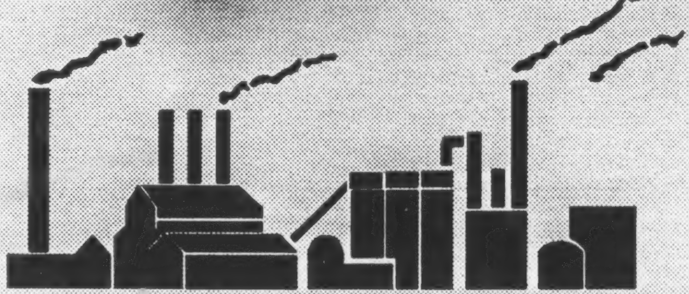
Marketing of the program has been handled in a number of ways. In the beginning, Frontier College invited all staff to general presentations of the LWP. They also encouraged staff participation during their initial needs assessment exercise. The LWP committee located at each work site was responsible for marketing the program in that area. Committee members made a point of speaking with each staff person individually to encourage participation. Staff designed creative posters and hung them strategically throughout the terminal. It was also advertised through supervisors as well as the LWP newsletter.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

A question asked to participants in this case study involved specific advice that one would give to other companies who are just starting up a workplace education program. The advice can best be summarized as follows:

- Implement such a program because it fosters a "learning culture" which is critical for a company's survival in changing times
- Ensure that management and the union support the program
- Ensure that company employees are permitted to give their input prior to program implementation
- The tutors and learners should be well matched
- Make the learning program available to all staff regardless of their position within the company

British Columbia Construction Industry



Basic Skills Upgrading Program of SkillPlan

A program sketch...

Basic Skills Upgrading Program of SkillPlan British Columbia, Construction Industry

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Basic Skills Upgrading Program of SkillPlan in Vancouver is a highly successful industry-wide pilot project. The major factors contributing to success are collaboration, thoroughness and innovation.

The three major **partners** in this project are the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council, the Construction Labour Relations Council, and the Open Learning Agency. All have collaborated to develop a variety of learning opportunities for workers in the construction industry of BC.

This pilot project was characterized by **thorough planning**, evidenced by a concerted needs assessment, numerous job analyses, professional advice, and widespread input. From the beginning, there has been a commitment to excellence, and long-term credibility and utility.

In a number of ways, project success is due to the willingness to innovate. Rather than attempt to adapt existing educational programs, those involved in this project went about developing unique partnerships, counselling services and instructional modes. Response has been very positive from workers who have met their individual learning goals and achieved increased self-esteem, from employers who are pleased with more flexible workers, and from the educational organization that has successfully adopted a **new learning technology**.

In large part, the success of this project is attributed to four initial decisions, to base the project on a broad definition of basic skills, on integration of basic skills and trades/technical skills, on a bias against standardized testing, and on the approach of responding to needs rather than imposing training.

Program Profile

- Construction industry in BC
- industry-wide basis
- pilot project
- partnership of industry, labour and education
- computer-based instruction
- innovative computer program
- initial counselling services
- drop-in centre
- 100% employee time
- basic skills upgrading related to major changes in the industry
- expert, long-range planning
- resources from the National Literacy Secretariat

Basic Skills Upgrading Program of SkillPlan in Vancouver

Industry Background

Factors contributing to program success

- **Joint Partnership of Industry, Labour Education and Government**
- **Long Range Planning**
- **Innovative Use of Technology**

One of the skills upgrading or "workplace literacy" programs that is identified with SkillPlan in the greater Vancouver area is an industry-wide basic skills upgrading program. The construction industry in British Columbia involves approximately 45,000 individuals. The industry is enjoying relative prosperity, compared, that is, with the difficult economic times of the 1980s. Leaders are cautiously optimistic about retaining current levels of employment and continued work in the immediate future. In this industry, the unionized labour are represented by the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council, and the leading employers who employ unionized labour are represented by the Construction Labour Relations Council.

Human Resources Policy and Issues

SkillPlan has developed the Basic Skills Upgrading Project as an industry-wide project because of some obvious human resource policies and issues. One such policy is the strong union support and direction for training and upgrading of its members. Closely allied is the recognition by the employer group that workers in the construction industry need to increase basic academic skills, and that the expenditure on training is an investment in good workers and workmanship. There appears to be a well-established training culture within the industry that contributes to human resource development in a routine and appreciated way.

From a different perspective, a human resource issue is reflected in the seasonal and ever-changing nature of work in the construction industry. For instance, a worker may be temporarily but offically unemployed for a short time between jobs; this effects Employment and Immigration Canada program accessibility. As well, in some but not all parts of the industry, seasonal unemployment is characteristic, having repercussions for industry-wide training plans and programs. For these reasons, human resource development opportunities must be individualized in most cases.

Finally, this training program has been developed on an industry-wide, individualized basis because of the pattern of employment in the industry. Specifically, while there are a wide variety of specialty areas in the construction industry and large numbers employed in each, any given employer will typically employ small numbers of each across a wide spectrum of specialization. Therefore, it seems unlikely that any one employer or business in the industry would find it easy or feasible to develop an in-house skills upgrading program. This philosophy is fundamental, as well, to the Open Learning Agency. Clearly, this program entails a unique partnership between industry and education.

Program Description

This skills upgrading program is a portion of SkillPlan, a joint effort of labour and management in the BC and Yukon organized construction industry. SkillPlan was conceived as a coordinated and flexible training opportunity for workers in the industry, attempting to meet the wide variety of training needs ranging from basic literacy and English as a Second Language through to supporting advanced technical and management skills.

As needs are articulated, part of the process is to identify potential and optimal providers. In the case of this upgrading program, the Open Learning Agency (OLA) has been contracted because it best matches the intentions of SkillPlan on behalf of the potential students. It was able to provide greater flexibility and innovation than other traditional educational institutions. At the OLA Learning Center in Burnaby, learning [illegible] place on the students' own free time. Computerized assessment and instruction, course development and materials are provided free of charge to the learner.

The BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council or "SkillPlan" is a registered society managed by the British Columbia Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council. It is a cost-shared project of the Construction Labour Relations (CLR) Association of BC, which represents over 400 contractors, and the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council, representing 16 trade unions. Funding for the upgrading component of SkillPlan is provided by four sources. Together, Employment and Immigration Canada and the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology have funded the needs assessment, course development and instruction costs. The Open Learning Agency has made a substantial contribution, purchasing the computer hardware and software, providing the classroom, the learning lab and instructors. SkillPlan has contributed salaried leadership and developmental expertise.

Services and Training Delivered

Services in the SkillPlan upgrading program include both counselling and instruction. For individuals and groups, an adult education specialist provides advice and assistance in choosing appropriate training opportunities; for some it will be the upgrading program and for others a form of personal fulfillment. Students self-select and volunteer to become involved in this basic skills program.

For purposes of SkillPlan, the term "basic skills" has been defined to mean the communication skills required by trades people in the construction industry, specifically reading, writing, numeracy, comprehension and oral communications.

Actual skills training is provided through the Open Learning Agency at their Burnaby Training Centre. Using Josten's "Invest" computer software, instruction is completely individualized and approximately 50% computer-based. Some small group instruction takes place when a common need is identified. The Invest integrated learning system is used to initially and continuously assess the individual's skill levels, to manage a learning program, and to provide direct instruction. The curriculum of the Invest software is based on the American GED (General Education Diploma); thus, it can serve as GED preparation but it does not necessarily culminate in the GED examination. That is a student's personal choice and several SkillPlan students have now completed their GED's. Others have achieved the personal goals established at their entry into the program. The computer software is also used to upgrade basic skills for apprenticeship students, people taking health and safety courses, and other work-related programs or ESL-related goals.

The program is operated on an open-entry/open-exit basis. The program in general and the instruction in particular are based on accepted adult education principles and developed explicitly for adult learners. At the OLA Training Centre, there is a mix of students much like at any other institute of learning; SkillPlan students are not distinctive in any way except for the policies and practices imposed on them by the unique working conditions in their industry.

Decision Making About the Program

All decisions about the skills upgrading component of SkillPlan are jointly made by a steering committee comprised of both labour and industry together with the provider, the Open Learning Agency. This committee is chaired by a respected adult educator who brings a fourth perspective. Professional advice and leadership are provided by the paid personnel, the executive director and consultants of SkillPlan, the coordinating and instructional staff at the OLA. Individuals choose their own goals, and this results in learning plans, curriculum content, instruction and progression speed being set up for them by the computerized system at the Burnaby OLA Learning Centre.

Impact of the Program

Since its inception, the upgrading component of SkillPlan has involved approximately 110 individuals, of which 71 have successfully completed the program. Some have written the GED exam at the conclusion of their involvement. Others are on the waiting list for the next intake. Staff recount a number of success stories. The single most important outcome of this program has been the way in which the learners' views of themselves and their world have been improved.

As importantly, the various partners have been positively impacted by the program. For many, it is a first exposure to a working relationship with the other key partners. In addition, the Open Learning Agency has been able to pilot new instructional software and processes.

Barriers to Implementation

Individuals closely associated with this upgrading program are hard pressed to list any barriers to implementation. A combination of available funding, political interest, expertise, acknowledged need and dynamic leadership seems to have diminished those impediments which might have intimidated some.

The major impediments were presented largely by the innovative and industry-wide magnitude of the project. For example, EIC offices had to be convinced to amalgamate program funding across districts. As well, a change in government caused delays. However, these timing and structure problems were not insurmountable.

Two continuing and interrelated problems are the ad hoc nature of funding and the difficulty of finding and retaining appropriate instructional staff.

Policy Influences

One policy influence relates to the nature of the industry. It is undergoing rapid and constant change. While the individuals working in the industry are often highly skilled, competent and intelligent, the trades-related skill demands keep changing and increasing. As well, like many industries in Canada, there is a movement away from Taylorism and towards Total Quality Management, resulting in a different mix of skill requirements. Finally, as union membership has been decreasing, union leadership recognize that members need opportunities to develop more skills and new skills in order to remain employed.

Factors Contributing to Success

SkillPlan personnel have identified at least four major factors contributing to success, that is, philosophical underpinnings that dictate program policy. The first is the choice of a broad rather than narrow definition of literacy and basic skills. Instead of focusing on those relatively few individuals who required basic literacy instruction, the focus is widened to include the broader spectrum of basic skills needs and hence, the larger number of individuals. In addition, the word "literacy" is not used on the premise that it is limiting and/or negative. For the same reasons, the word "basic" (as in basic skills) is also being dropped. The second factor is a belief that integration of basic skills and trades/technical skills is both appropriate and desirable. This influences the choice of materials and approaches. This has also led to the beginnings of individualized curricula for specific trades. A third factor is a bias against standardized testing. The bias significantly influences the entry process, public relations, and student body. This is not to say that learners are not assessed; learning is assessed in a continuous manner. A fourth factor contributing to success is the approach of responding to the learner needs rather than imposing views in general and training in particular.

In addition to those factors identified by SkillPlan personnel, some other significant success factors relate to attitudes, individuals, and partnerships. Regarding attitudes, contributing to the program success were, first, the unchallenged acceptance of the magnitude of the problem being addressed; second, the "can do" attitude of an industry that "makes things happen"; third, the awareness that a non-traditional approach was needed; and fourth, a desire for an atypically long term approach. As well, significant individuals made a difference, especially, the energy, initiative and competence of the leadership and consultants. Too, the wide variety, flexibility and creativity of partners contributed to the program success.

Finally, the sophistication of the technology is considered to be a critical success factor. The Invest software is adult-oriented, providing self-paced, multi-level learning. As there is no lag time between question and answer, there are considered to be "more teachable moments" than in traditional instruction. As well, the computerized technology is transportable, delivered to the worksite if required. A particular value of this integrated learning system is the ability to generate quantitative results in terms of hours and grade levels achieved. Students were reported to be particularly satisfied with this instructional approach, both because of the content and the computer skill acquired.

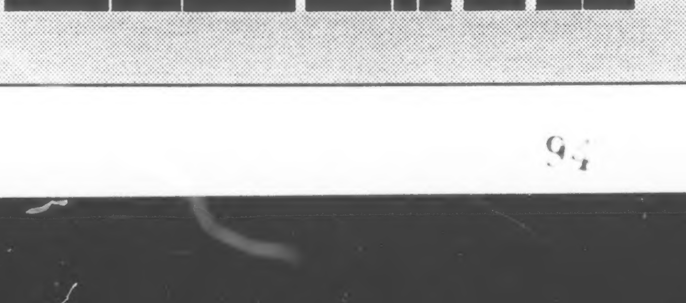
Advice to Others Considering a Similar Program

In addition to applying the many factors contributing to success, some further advice from the SkillPlan experience is the following.

- Identify and build on the explicit basic skill demands in specific occupations through job analysis
- Tie the upgrading program to a highly respected management philosophy

- Allow participants to identify and address their own perceived needs
- Individualize at all levels. Mass appeal doesn't work
- Provide counselling at the outset. It is critical to initial decision-making and long term success for students
- Build in the human touch. Computers are a great beginning but not an end in themselves
- A store-front operation, removed from the working environment, has an enormous appeal

Dominion Bridge



Basic Education in the Workplace - An Employee Development Program

A program sketch...

The Basic Education in the Workplace Program: Dominion Bridge

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Workplace Education Program at Dominion Bridge in Winnipeg is a successful beginning to significant change in that workplace. Management and labour have determined that basic skills upgrading is an essential ingredient in adapting to increased competition and global demand for change in the steel industry. This commitment is an important factor to the success of the program. Additional factors are the importance of partnerships and elements of the initiation and implementation processes.

In addition to the union and management at Dominion Bridge, the **Literacy Office of Manitoba Education and Training** is a critical partner in the project. The enthusiasm and expertise of the personnel in that office have been instrumental in the ongoing development of the project. Willingness of the three partners to be honest and innovative has been a critical success factor.

Some program success factors relate to initiation, specifically the fact that the program was not imposed by management; the availability of an **expert in vocational education and workplace literacy**; the extensive public relations groundwork laid by this expert and her willingness to be seen on the shop floor rather than just in the boardroom; the support, expertise and enthusiasm resident in the provincial literacy office; the availability and complementarity of **two funding government programs**. A particular contributing factor was time to develop procedures for literacy task analysis and organizational needs assessment with specific applicability to Dominion Bridge.

Other factors of success relate to the implementation of the program, specifically, the fact that training was directed at real rather than potential jobs; the consideration that the scheduling and location accommodated the workers and that it was free of charge.

Program Profile

- upgrade basic academic skills
- just getting started
- needs assessment
- literacy task analysis
- classroom-based
- individualized curriculum
- on-site instruction
- 2 hours, 2 times per week
- 50% company time, 50% employee time
- extensive public relations
- partnership between union, management and government
- certified instructors

The Workplace Education Program at Dominion Bridge

Company Background

Dominion Bridge is a large steel fabricating plant in Winnipeg, Manitoba, one of four plants operated by Dominion Bridge in Canada. In Winnipeg, Dominion Bridge employs approximately 250 individuals, almost totally men who are involved in the processing of raw steel into such products as steel girders. The labour force is represented by the United Steel Workers of America. Worldwide, the steel industry is experiencing severe pressure for increased competitiveness from decreasing markets.

Factors contributing to program success

- **Leadership from Provincial Literacy Office**
- **Availability of Experts in Vocational Education**
- **National Literacy Secretariat as Catalyst**
- **Awareness of Linkage Between Competitiveness and Skills Upgrading**

Human Resource Policy and Issues

The entire workforce at Dominion Bridge appears to be well aware of the pressures facing the company. As a result of a variety of pressures and problems, the workforce was downsized from approximately 350 to the current 250 in 1991. This was a difficult and devastating process for many, resulting in a sincere attempt by all who remained to do whatever was necessary and appropriate to maintain the financial viability of the company.

Management and union leadership are in the process of trying to develop and implement new practices that would hopefully improve productivity. For example, in order to increase communication and understanding of the problems being faced, the practice of beginning and ending every shift with a fifteen-minute staff meeting was started. At this time, as well, the Employee Development Program was initiated at the urging of the union, and the vehicle for the first development activity became basic skills upgrading opportunities.

The decision to upgrade the literacy and basic skills of workers was directly related to and reinforced by the awareness that the remaining personnel were not necessarily being used to maximum advantage. Because individuals, through seniority and other labour practices, had come to own the rights to certain jobs, a problem was presented by two circumstances. On the one hand, some actual work stations or positions did not have an extensive amount of work to process at all times. Therefore, some workers were inappropriately idle at times and swamped with unattainable expectations at others. However, because the job rights were "owned" by individuals, no one else could step in to help.

Therefore, in order to enhance efficiency, the system of cross training and job sharing is in the first stage of development. This means that, within work teams, each member is to be trained to do the work of each other team member, and then systematically rotated through each task or job. This surfaced two major literacy-related problems. First, in order to train individuals, manuals describing the jobs needed to be developed as none existed. Secondly, some individuals did not possess the requisite information processing skills for this or other important work-related literacy tasks. Job sharing and cross training is resulting in more interesting and demanding work for all employees.

Added to this was an awareness on the part of management that the organization had to be "flattened" by reducing the size of middle management. This meant more decentralized decision-making, requiring increased responsibility and decision-making ability together with increased print-based learning and reading demands for all workers. The company felt forced to increase efficiency with reduced numbers of employees: a double challenge.

Program Description

The workplace literacy project at Dominion Bridge has taken a two-pronged approach. First, a workplace literacy consultant was contracted by the Workplace Steering Committee (WSC) to develop some pilot training manuals; three specific jobs have been targetted as a pilot project. This will have the subsequent effect of creating an additional literacy demand for jobs as individuals use these training manuals in learning new jobs. To this point, when an individual required training, s/he was informally apprenticed to an experienced worker who simply imparted what s/he knew and how s/he did the job, good and bad habits included. Both union and management felt that accurate and complete training manuals would simultaneously enhance the cross training process and company efficiency.

The second approach was to create learning opportunities for employees. The workplace education component of the Employee Development Program at Dominion Bridge in Winnipeg entails a basic skills upgrading program. A team of management and labour at Dominion Bridge came in contact with the Workplace Steering Committee that had been created to receive and process both adult literacy funds from the National Literacy Secretariat and adult literacy needs identified by business and industry in Manitoba. The WSC is a tri-partite steering committee comprised of committed and influential representatives, two from the business sector and two from the labour sector; the coordinator of the Basic Education in the Workplace and the Manitoba Literacy Office. The committee had decided that, in Manitoba, an appropriate approach to providing adult basic skills upgrading in the workplace should be a collaborative effort of employees and employers. Funding for program development comes from the National Literacy Partnerships Strategy. Funding for instruction comes from the Workplace Language Training program, funded by Employment and Immigration Canada and delivered by the Manitoba Literacy Office, a branch of Manitoba Education and Training.

Services and Training Delivered

The services and training delivered to employees at Dominion Bridge in Winnipeg take the form of three class options. Workers have volunteered and selected themselves into classes which focus on math only, communications and math, and/or ESL literacy. The classes are led by qualified instructors, hired and supervised by the Coordinator of Basic Education in the Workplace in the Literacy Office of Manitoba Education and Training. The learning needs are self-identified, and the curriculum is therefore individualized to a large extent. A portion of each class is a group activity directed at a common issue with self-paced, individualized programs for the remainder of the class time.

Dominion Bridge has provided classroom space at the plant, and each class is offered twice weekly for a 2 hour period. In total, each employee is given two hours release time per week and contributes two hours of volunteer time. The classes are intended to continue for a 20 week period commencing in late October 1992. Approximately 25 individuals are currently involved. All are male steel workers involved in heavy manufacturing labour work.

Decision Making about the Program

Essentially, there have been three levels of decision making involved in this program. First, the WSC developed a systematic approach to workplace basic education programs in Manitoba. Specifically, it was decided to develop workplace basic skills education sectorally with agriculture and manufacturing being the first two to be developed. Dominion Bridge, as a steel fabricating plant, fit into the second category and provided the venue for a pilot project. Continued support and liaison comes from the steering committee.

Second, the Literacy Office coordinator worked with management and labour at Dominion Bridge to raise awareness and acceptance of the issues and needs, leading to decision making regarding implementation of the program. The Literacy Office supervises the staff and provides teaching resources and technical expertise.

Thirdly, individual employees decide if, when and how to access the opportunity. Success in the program is relative to the expressed needs of each individual.

Impact of the Program

In some respects, it is too early to assess the impact of the program. As classroom programming has just begun, actual outcomes cannot be determined. However, the program began long before actual classroom instruction began, and to that end, some positive impacts have surfaced. For example, there seems to be general consensus that the program has enhanced management-labour communication and cooperation. There is a definite team approach to the program. Also, the program has instilled a sense of hope in an environment charged with uncertainty and fear. Management and labour fear for continued employment for individuals and continued operations of the plant in an industry characterized by massive shut-downs. While this program cannot solve all problems, it is seen as a positive, proactive beginning, and possibly essential to plant survival.

As mentioned earlier, program success is related largely to the expressed needs of individual students. While many are hoping only to improve basic skills in math and communications, others are aiming at writing the GED test. Few are hoping for promotions or other specific rewards. All are hoping that they can just keep their jobs, hoping that upgrading will help them indirectly in this manner. Some noted that they were fearful that, like many other Dominion Bridge plants in Canada, theirs too would have to close. They hoped that the upgrading would put them in a better position to perhaps find employment elsewhere if that happened. Although training tasks are job-specific, some individuals have expressed increased interest and ability in helping their children with school work.

For the employer, the program may have had a real significant impact. Since the inception of the Employee Development Program, there have been far fewer workplace accidents. While there is no attempt to directly attribute this to the program, there is considerable speculation.

Another type of positive impact of the program is related to the ongoing development of the field. Specifically, the workplace education specialist noted the refinement of such development processes as the literacy task analysis and the organizational needs assessment.

Finally some general impacts to date have included an increased interest in training by both employees and employers. According to the Manitoba Literacy Office, interest and involvement in workplace education continues to mature and expand.

Barriers to Implementation

In this particular case, there were very few barriers to implementation. Advice, direction, financial assistance, expertise and interest were all available. Management at Dominion Bridge did not experience any opposition from the company. The union found extensive support at all its levels. In this way, the Dominion Bridge program is quite remarkable.

Minor problems have been presented, to date, by the relative isolation within Dominion Bridge of the ESL-type workers, and by the lack of clerical support for the teaching staff.

It is noteworthy that many participants expressed a barrier to continued and expanded programs, specifically the ad hoc, pilot project nature of the funding for the training manual development. All expressed a desire for more secure funding and more long-term training schedules.

Policy Influences

Policy influences in this workplace education situation are related to five different areas. First, in relation to the format of the program, it is clearly different from others described in this report. The policy influence here was twofold. The joint business/labour provincial steering committee provided initial direction in the choices made: collaborative, professional programs on a sectoral, industry-specific and job-specific basis. As well, the provincial literacy office provided a policy direction in that it based its approaches and recommendations largely on the model for English in the Workplace which had been developed in the United Kingdom.

A second policy influence, in developing and implementing the program, was the size and influence of the United Steel Workers of America. Often there is an advantage to the large numbers ar credibility inherent in such a large organization.

A third area of policy influence was the nature of Dominion Bridge and the steel industry in general. The industry is seen as an old manufacturing industry with little high-tech influence. However, processes and demands are changing rapidly, and both the traditional plant and employee are not adequately prepared to deal with the stress of this situation. Formal training has not been a component of the industrial culture to this point. As well, the introduction of WHMIS added increased literacy demands and procedural changes. Thus, the development and implementation of this workplace program is both reactive and proactive.

A fourth area of policy influence is the underlying philosophical approach to literacy education prevalent in Manitoba. The provincial literacy office does not ascribe to the deficiency-model of literacy programming; instead, it emphasizes building on the strengths and abilities of individuals and organizations. The label "literacy" has not been used deliberately; "upgrading," "workplace skills," and "job competencies" are utilized instead.

A fifth policy influence was the attitude of the management and union at Dominion Bridge. This is reflected in the willingness to invest in their workforce, a willingness to take a risk in initiating the program without hard evidence of accountability; interest in developing a lifelong learning culture. Although training is expensive for the company, it is viewed as a necessary, long-term investment.

Factors Contributing to Success

According to individuals directly related to the program at Dominion Bridge in Winnipeg, there are several factors contributing to the initial success of the program.

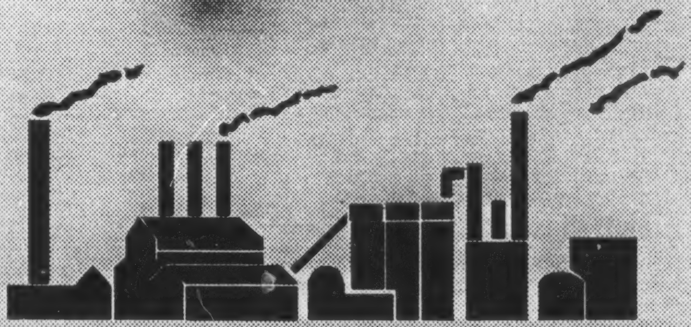
Some factors relate to initiation, specifically the fact that the program was not imposed by management; the availability of a expert in vocational education and workplace literacy; the extensive public relations groundwork laid by this expert and her willingness to be seen on the shop floor rather than just in the boardroom; the support, expertise and enthusiasm resident in the provincial literacy office; the availability and complementarity of two funding government programs. A particular contributing factor was the time given to develop procedures for literacy task analysis and organizational needs assessment with specific applicability to Dominion Bridge.

Other factors relate to the implementation of the program, specifically, the fact that the training was directed at real rather than potential jobs; the consideration that the scheduling and location accommodated the workers and that it was free of charge. Some students noted that they were glad that they didn't have to "drive all the way home," get cleaned up from work, and go to "the college for classes. Convenience was paramount.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

Advice was solicited from all participants. The program organizers feel that it is really important to be responsive to industry schedules. Professional literacy staff recognize that it's a strength to admit that there are no absolute answers and that the development process is one of experimentation. They note that sometimes employers and employees ask questions but they don't like the answers they get; reality does not always match perception but it cannot be avoided indefinitely. The close collaboration and cooperation of management and labour working in partnership is seen as critical.

Sucre Lantic



Basic Skills Education Program

A program sketch...

Basic Skills Education Program
Sucre Lantic

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

Still in its early stages, the Basic Skills Education Program at Sucre Lantic appears to be quite successful. Significant factors contributing to its success have been the assistance of the Quebec Federation of labour, the unconditional support of the union leadership, support from management, provincial education funding and a sensitive approach to recruitment.

The Quebec Federation of Labour addresses literacy as a social question and human right, and has provided training of **literacy co-ordinators at local union levels**. The union has been the driving force behind Sucre Lantic's Basic Skills Education Program. The trained union representative acts as a liaison with management who, although not directly involved in setting up the program, has fully supported its operation. **Management** feels the program will contribute to increased productivity, quality circles and improved relations with workers. However, it is the union who has negotiated a custom-tailored program with the local school board, completes individual needs assessments and recruits participants with an approach that fosters encouragement, confidence and trust.

The **local school board** that is providing the teacher and **materials** received adequate public funding to undertake this program and yield a service that is free to its trainees.

Union representatives recruit participants without pressure. If workers resist involvement, they are reminded of their rights even if their literacy skills have become out of date.

All these factors work together to produce a Basic Skills Education Program at Sucre Lantic that is viable and psychologically attractive to its workers.

Program Profile

- union established and union run
- support from the Quebec Federation of Labour
- introduction of new technology and quality circles
- provincial education funding
- support from all levels of management
- basic skills training course for union representatives
- union representative acts as liaison with management
- local school board
- custom tailored program
- voluntary participation
- increase in self-confidence

Basic Skills Education Program - Sucre Lantic

Company Background

Sucre Lantic, the only sugar refinery in Montreal serves the eastern region of Canada, including Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. Established in 1879, Sucre Lantic was more recently bought by B. C. Sugar who operates other sugar operations including refineries in Saint John, New Brunswick and New York State, a warehouse in Toronto and a Head Office in Vancouver.

Factors contributing to program success

- **Leadership of Quebec Federation of Labour**
- **Federal and Provincial Funding**
- **Sensitive Approach to Recruitment**
- **Support from Management**

Sucre Lantic's Montreal operation is a refinery. It receives boat loads of raw cane sugar from Cuba and refines it into white sugar, brown sugar and icing sugar. There are over 280 workers in the Monteal plant with 90% men and 10% women. The average age is 40 years with an age range of 20 to 60 years. All the workers are francophone with the exception of four.

Workers have been represented by a union for the past 43 years. The local union is part of the Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers Union which is an affiliate of the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ/QFL). One of the services the FTQ provides for its affilitates is an extensive education program. Two years ago the FTQ received a substantial grant from the National Literacy Secretariat to develop a network of local experts throughout its affilitates who could coordinate the development of basic skills in the workplace programs.

In November, 1991, the first week long Basic Skills training course took place. Twenty-six participants from various affiliates took part in the course and a follow-up meeting in June 1992. A number of workplace basic skills programs were developed as a result of the FTQ's initiative, including Sucre Lantic. The FTQ has chosen to work in co-operation with school boards and community groups who will deliver custom-tailored programs to local unions.

Human Resource Policy and Issues

In the context of current high levels of unemployment across Canada and a particularly high level in the plant's neighbourhood, Sucre Lantic's workforce has been very stable in past years. Recruitment, when needed, is generally done internally and through family and friends of workers at the refinery. There is no shortage of qualified workers in the area and workers already in the plant are highly unlikely to quit their jobs given the high unemployment level in the surrounding area.

Great changes have been felt at Sucre Lantic with the introduction of new technology and quality circles. With technological change, training has expanded. However, training generally follows promotion or job change, and is oriented to a particular job. Recently the company has insisted that workers have Grade 12 (Secondaire V) for new positions. According to the Director of Human Resources, supervisors had complained about basic skills problems among workers particularly in the areas of reading, writing and computation.

Company policy regarding sick leave, vacation and lateness is more generous than the average, and Sucre Lantic offers salaries that are similar to other companies in the area. Fringe benefits include health and drug insurance, life and disability insurance, pensions, holidays, parental leave and tuition reimbursement.

The two major factors in the increase in Sucre Lantic's productivity have been the introduction of new technology and quality circles. Management considers that labour-management relations have evolved from a previously confrontational style to a more cooperative mode. The union president agrees, but expresses concerns about future relations should there be changes in the present relatively stable situation. The union has no input into decisions about productivity or downsizing except through the seniority clauses of its collective agreement.

At Sucre Lantic 77% of the workforce is in production. Skills requiring attention involve the ability of the workers to read, write and compute, to function as an effective team and to solve work related problems.

Program Description

The motivating force in setting up this Basic Skills Education program was the then president of the local union. On the basis of his participation in the FTQ's training program and with full support from the FTQ staff, he undertook to spend at least $4,000 worth of union time to write articles for the union's newsletter, organize needs assessments of most of the workers in the refinery, negotiate with management and the local scool board, as well as recruit workers for the first program. The FTQ Basic Skills co-ordinator supported his initiative with approximately $600 worth of federation support in addition to the training already provided.

The goal of the program, as expressed by the union is to bring the classroom to the workplace and ensure a rounded education with transferable training. The union representative has acted as liaison with management through the Director of Human Resources, but management has not been all that involved in setting up the program. The company is providing half of the release time, facilities at the work site and some educational materials, but is not involved in an on-going way. Its support has been important in terms of the program's credibility, but the main force behind the program has been the union.

Services and Training Delivered

The Basic Skills Education Program at Sucre Lantic began in September, 1992. The union negotiated a custom-tailored program with the local school board with the goal of responding to the needs of the production workers. Participation in the program is entirely voluntary. The union feels this is the only way to help workers feel comfortable enough to enrol. They are confident that the current program's success will attract others who might have some doubts.

Currently 18 people are participating in the program divided into two classes to accommodate shift work. One class meets between 3 and 5 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday; the other class meets at the same time on Tuesday and Thursday. Both classes have ten or fewer participants. Because of shift changes, this schedule means that the company pays for half of the workers' time, while the workers cover the other half. The length of the course has been targeted for 4 to 6 months.

Reading and writing in French, as well as some mathematics is being offered in the classes. Reflecting Sucre Lantic's workforce, all but one of the participants are men. They range in age from 25 to 53. A majority have some high school, while 1/3 have 8th Grade or less.

In the beginning classes were very group oriented but as the course progressed, there has been more individual attention due to the different levels of the participants.

The local school board that is providing the teacher and materials received adequate public funding to yield a service without a charge. This amounts to approximately $280 a week. Because the company provides the facilities on-site, there are no operating costs for the program. Start up costs were largely covered by in-time contributions from the local union and the FTQ. The local union spent about $4,000 in in-time costs for the union person who initiated the program. The FTQ spent about $620 in in-time support in addition to their training program. The company donated books (a set of Besherelles) for each participant, which amounted to approximately $720.

Decision Making About The Program

There was absoluterly no resistance on the part of management to the unon's initiative. The company feels that the program will contribute to their efforts to increase productivity through technological change, quality circles and improved relations with workers.

The union, as initiators of the program played the central role in doing the individual needs assessments and negotiating the content of the program with the school board, as well as acting as liaison with management. The only difficulty in recruitment was ascribed to workers' pride.

The program is still young and participants feel they need some time to clarify their own needs before actively participating in decision-making about the program.

Impact of the Program

Since the program is new, any comments on program impacts are only initial, perhaps reflecting wishes and desired outcomes rather than the results of a sustained experience.

Although management has been supportive of the program, it has not been involved in the actual set-up and running of it. The Director of Human Resources expressed general satisfaction with the program but could not be very specific.

The union representative who had been closely involved in all aspects of the program's set-up expressed satisfaction with almost all areas of the program. The union was not concerned with workplace impacts as their major goal was to meet the individual needs of the participants. Focus group participants could not comment on overall impacts, but expressed satisfaction with the development of their own self esteem and confidence. They did not feel at this point that the program would improve their level of satisfaction at work, nor their attitude toward the company. They did express overall satisfaction with learning/teaching as well as the access, scheduling, logistics and support. While members did not experience any barriers to their participation in the program, a few people felt that family conflicts and embarrassment might be barriers to future participation, whether it be themselves or other workers not yet enrolled in the program.

Participants are involved in the program because of the efforts of the union. It is the union which encourages them and hears their needs and problems. They did not want management to be more involved.

The instructor of the Basic Skills Education Program is also satisfied with the learning and teaching aspects of the prorgram to date.

Barriers to Implementation

No barriers to implementation have been identified at the Basic Skills Education Program at Sucre Lantic. All levels of management have supported the initiative as well as the union, employees, the school board and the program instructor.

Policy Influences

Two different frames of reference are evident when discussing policy influences at Sucre Lantic. The Director of Human Resources, once a teacher himself, believes workplace basic skills programs should be job integrated, while the union believes that a more general approach is appropriate. The Director of Human Resources is in favour of basic skills certification and is supportive of the company offering higher wages to workers who have successfully completed a certification/testing process. The union is opposed, in principle to testing. Both management and union are in favour of local forums and networks to talk to other employers or unions about workplace education programs.

Other factors which may influence the company's decision to implement and/or expand a workplace education program would be the existence of a federal tax credit and if costs of training could be used to offset a percentage of the company's contribution to the unemployment insurance fund.

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

The Basic Skills Education Program at Sucre Lantic appears to be quite successsful even though it is only a few months old. Significant factors contributing to its success have been the assistance of the FTQ, the unconditional support of the union leadership, provincial education funding, a sensitive approach to recruitment, and support from management to develop job training and basic skills programs, .

The FTQ addresses literacy as a social question and human right. Improving workers' basic skills will ultimately help them deal with a workplace that is changing, with increased mobility in the labour market and with the ability to exercise rights and responsibilities in the union and within society in general.

According to the FTQ, worker training is at the centre of workers' collective future since it directly impacts employment as well as on workers' quality of life at home and in society. Basic skills upgrading is an integral part of developing an overall training culture, enabling all workers to benefit from training programs that may be offered. When approaching the literacy question the FTQ choose a collective action based on solidarity - the issue of literacy and training is addressed to all union members and not uniquely to those who might need basic skills upgrading.

Because the union has been the motivating force throughout this program's set-up and operation, the union believes that in any workplace where a union exists, the union's role is vital to the success of the program. At Sucre Lantic, the trained union representative acts as a liaison with management who, although not directly involved in setting up the program has fully supported its operation. It has provided half of the release time, facilities at the work site and some educational materials - all of which help establish confidence in the program. Management feels the program will contribute to increased productivity, quality circles and improved relations with workers. However, it is the union who has negotiated a custom-tailored program with the local school board. The union does the individual needs assessments and recruits participants with a soft approach - encouraging them and listening to their needs and problems.

The local school board that is providing the teacher and materials to the Sucre Lantic workplace education program had adequate funding to undertake this initiative and provide a service that is free of charge to participants. The union prefers the publicly funded route because it feels that basic skills programs are a human right and should be available to all adults. In addition, most local school boards will work in equal partnership with unions to develop programs.

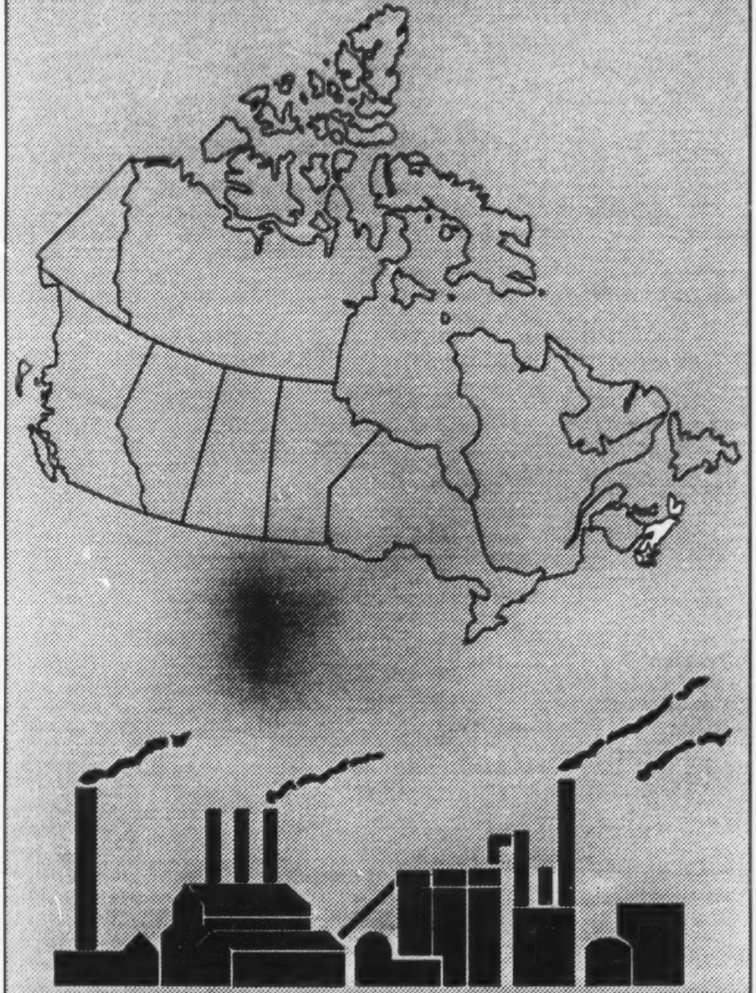
Union representatives at Sucre Lantic recruit participants carefully, without pressure and with great sensitivity. If the worker reacts against ideas to become involved, the union literacy person respects this decision and does not push. Workers are reminded they still have rights even if their literacy skills have become out-of-date.

Participants clearly see this program as a union initiative and feel more of a sense of ownership than they would with a management initiated program. Even the current president of the local union is a participant, thus setting a real public example of the acceptability of the program.

Advice To Others Planning A Similar Program

- Ensure union involvement in all aspects of the program.
- Address the training needs of all the workers, not just basic skills.
- Assure union members that their rights will be protected, regardless of their skill level.
- Work with a publicly-funded provider who is open to union involvement.

Seagull Pewter & Silversmiths



Workplace Upgrading Program

A program sketch...

Workplace Upgrading Program
Seagull Pewter & Silversmiths Ltd.

Factors Contributing to the Program Success

Throughout the interviews with program participants, there seemed to be a clear consensus as to what factors contributed to the success of the workplace upgrading program at Seagull Pewter and Silversmiths Ltd. The three significant factors of company support, the experience of the regional literacy facilitators and a customized curriculum were common themes which emerged.

Management support for the program was considered to be a major factor. Even before the initiative was launched in 1989, this medium sized business had established a training culture with developmental opportunities for its employees. As the planning and implementation stages of the program took place, there was a dedicated and continual support from both owners and management. As was stated by the employees, "the company owners care".

A second factor contributing to program success was the availability of regional **literacy facilitators** from the Nova Scotia Department of Education to service the company. In this case, services such as needs assessment, program design, curriculum development and program delivery were provided. This type of trained expertise was a key factor in Seagull Pewter and Silversmiths' active participation in workplace education.

Also important to the success of the program was the **customized curriculum** developed by the college instructor and in house staff person. Each class was specifically tailored to the particular needs of the workplace using materials from the different sections. Related to this was the fact that the program was offered at the work site which made childcare easier to arrange for working mothers.

Program Profile

- family owned company employs over 300 people
- began program in 1989
- instruction at 6 - 9 grade level, preparation for GED
- content work-related
- regional literacy facilitators, Nova Scotia Department of Education
- Nova-Scotia Community College
- in-house staff person assisting with program development
- program impacts - self confidence and esteem, work independently, ask questions
- partial release time, training on work site

Workplace Upgrading Program
The Seagull Pewter and SilverSmith, Ltd.

Company Background

Seagull Pewter is a medium sized manufacturing company which employs over three hundred people in the Cumberland County located in Northern Nova Scotia. This family owned non-unionized business began in 1978 and has received numerous export achievement awards since the mid 80's. Presently, it has grown to occupy three large sites in the village of Pugwash. Many of the people who work at Seagull Pewter travel from other towns and villages in the county. Seventy-five percent of the company's work force are production workers with the majority being women.

Factors contributing to program success

- **Management Support**
- **Nova Scotia Department of Education**
- **Customized Curriculum**

As a result of increases in sales and market expansion, the company has been in a continual state of change with regard to management issues, product design processes and physical expansion. The major change affecting the company is the shift from a small business culture to a corporate culture. This type of change has created a need to further develop the company's training programs.

The Human Resource Policy and Issues

Over the recent years the nature of the training and education at Seagull Pewter has expanded. Employees at the management, clerical and production levels are now offered a number of training opportunities such as in-house seminars, on-the-job training and paid release for off-site training. Yearly staff turn over has not changed significantly over the past five years. However, production level workers tend to stay with the company for a shorter period of time than other occupational categories. When hiring for above entry positions current employees are given priority. Currently, Seagull Pewter does have a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement. When employees were asked about access to internal promotions, they felt that the lack of education and skills were serious barriers.

In terms of human resource issues, management feels that there are problems with absenteeism and productivity. In recent years productivity has gone up and down due to a union drive, a growing complexity of the product and a lack of technical support personnel. It is interesting to note that efforts such as test teams, which test the best ways to manufacture a product, and continuous improvement teams have been implemented to improve productivity. Bonuses and incentives have also been offered to combat poor morale and absenteeism. Coupled with this problem is the fact that many of the workers have difficulties with reading, writing, math and grasping the concept of team work. In addition, there is a lack of ability in workers to communicate orally and to solve work-related problems. As was stated by the Human Resoucre Manager, "We can't get our employees to think outside of themselves." As a result of these difficulties, a fair amount of time is spent by the supervisor explaining procedures and requirements to the production line workers.

Program Description

The first work place upgrading program at Seagull Pewter ran in 1989 to 1990. It provided instruction at an intermediate level (approximately grade six to nine) and its content was completely work related. A total of twenty-two workers participated in two different classes.

As a follow-up to this program, a new program was run in the following year to help participants prepare for the General Educational Development (GED) tests. Candidates who successfully write these exams in five content areas receive a grade twelve equivalency, which is accepted by the Nova Scotia Community College system and some universities for entrance into their programs. High school completion or equivalent is also needed to advance within in most areas the company at Seagull Pewter.

Following this effort, demand grew for a new program which was run in 1991 to 1992. At present there are twenty-eight workers who have enrolled in the January 1993 program.

Services and Training Delivered

Over the years, various forms of a standing committee with different employee representation has been responsible for the program operation with the Human Resource Manager administering the service. As well, a staff person at Seagull Pewter has been assigned to work directly with the workplace education program. She has completed a 33 hour training certification program for tutors and teachers offered by the Department of Education, Literacy Section and has worked with the college instructor during the last program teaching and support tutoring. Between the college instructor and the in-house staff person, they have been involved in the following program elements: the needs assessment, the program design, curriculum development, trouble shooting, program implementation, monitoring, evaluation and teaching.

As the program has evolved over the years, it is now described as more job integrated. At one point some curriculum details were customized and now the program is entirely customized. Both the instructor from the community college and the in-house instructor have worked with the company to tailor each class to the particular needs of the workplace. Conducting a literacy task analysis has helped in this exercise.

The focus of the training program has been instruction in reading, writing and mathematics. Small group interactive classes meet once a week for one to two hours during the work day at shift change. The program is offered for a four to six month interval on the work site with employees volunteering to participate.

Learners meet on shared company and employee time. In the very first program, negotiating for time release was a concern. The company was unfamiliar with the practice and felt that workers should give of their own time. However, in the end the company provided partial release time to program participants. The average age of participants is twenty-nine with a high proportion of women attending the program. The majority of learners are from the production line who have some high school education usually grade nine or less. Tutoring services are also available to participants.

Start-up and operating costs are shared by the company and the provincial government. Based on a six-month program at an average hourly wage of $7.50, the costs incurred by the company for the program includes the following: $3,600.00 in paid release time for twenty employees; starting costs including books, supplies and a large chalk board were $600.00; cost in lost production at $75.00 per employee for a total of $36,000.00; and miscellaneous costs at $400.00. Cost for the work place instructor to plan, implement and evaluate the program were covered by the Department of Education, Literacy Section. No fees are charged by the service provider.

Decision Making About The Program

It is very clear from the interviews with the different program participants that all of the "stakeholders" in the training program were involved in the decision making process. To begin with, there is an already existing participatory management style in this company where employees are encouraged to come forward with new ideas for production and to request training services from their supervisors. In this company the workers themselves identified a need for the workplace training program. When the regional literacy facilitator first approached the company to consider implementing such an initiative, all levels of employees were consulted for their input. Factors such as the need to transform the work organization, changes in the available work force and the availability of training percipitated the decision to implement a program. Arguments in favor of launching such a program came from a management, supervisor and employee perspective.

Production line workers were asked for their opinions as to what the program should look like and have regularly completed evaluations on the teaching of the program and their own satisfaction with the program. In addition, both the regional literacy facilitator and program instructors have talked to management, supervisors and the employees about what their goals are for the program and have translated these needs into the curriculum.

According to the Human Resource Manager, identifying the learning needs of the workers was a priority in the decision making process. This was followed by identifying the training needs of the workplace and securing funds to support the program. Through the expertise of the regional literacy facilitator, important decisions like finding an instructor, conducting the needs assessment, recruting participants, designing the program and securing funds to support the program were enhanced. As mentioned by the facilitator, "We carried out a thorough needs assessment based on the work place as a community concept. This meant viewing the work place as a distinct community and considering its geographical, cultural, political, racial organization make-up in the program design and implementation."

Impacts of the Program

Employees who have participated in the workplace upgrading program felt that there have been many impacts on their work life and on their family life. Trainees agreed that they have noticed significant changes in their abilities to read, compute, as well as an increased ability to communicate with workers and to work independently. "Before I took the course I only had grade ten. The course gave me more confidence to ask questions", said one respondent. Another mentioned that "I don't have to wait around to get help with measurements. I can do it myself".

In terms of personal satisfaction, employees felt that the program had a definite impact on the [illegible] confidence. [illegible] one employee said, "I am more sure of what I'm doing They were also more satisfied with their work and felt that they were employed by people who really cared. Through participation in the program, several employees have been able to advance in their job and now feel that they can achieve new goals. "If I hadn't got this course through work, I would have never done it". Because of increased self-esteem, they are now helping their children with their home work and taking more of an interest in the educational system.

The instructor, the in-house staff person and the regional literacy facilitator also confirmed the learning gains made by the participants especially in the areas of increased abilities to read, communicate, compute and problem solve. They observed increased morale, worker safety and a higher quality of worker interaction. As the Nova Scotia Community College instructor stated, "Employees began to rely more on their own skills instead of waiting around for me to help them which often required more time". The notion of a stronger self-esteem and confidence among employees was also noted by the instructors.

The Supervisor and Human Resource Manager felt that they had also observed learning gains in reading, communication and computation but only in a moderate sense. They feel that problem solving skills are rarely used by the workers, even though their work requires it and would like to see more results pertaining to this area of skills development. Morale, self-esteem and quality of worker interactions were all considered to be significant program impacts by management.

From all of the interviews conducted, there was a consensus that the program content, teaching methods, logistics and participation were satisfying aspects of the program. As one interviewee mentioned, "The instructor always knew what to expect from the students because they told him. Their openness helped in my planning. We always provided a time line as well. Adults like to know where they are going."

Barriers to Implementation

The workplace upgrading program at Seagull Pewter had very few barriers to implementation. Employees felt that they had been encouraged to participate by their supervisors but did not feel the pressure to do so. "The graduation ceremony with gifts for employees who had completed the program seemed to bring people forward to ask for help", said one employee. Some workers felt that if there were any barriers to participation then it would be the attitudinal problems among employees. "It would seem that many workers are just content to have a job and are not interested in being involved in self-improvement activities," reported an interviewee. On a slightly different note, the regional literacy facilitator mentioned that in terms of barriers, "without cost-sharing from the Department of Education, none of the workplace education programs carried out to date would have taken place."

Policy Influences

As the program continues to develop and expand, it will become increasingly important to tie the course work more closely to the jobs of each participant. Companies such as Seagull Pewter would also be interested in participating in local forums and networks established to provide opportunities to talk with other employers about the contributions and challenges of their programs. Based on their previous successful experience with the Department of Education and the Nova Scotia Community College, there is a continued need for such partnerships to offer, design, implement and provide a basic skills program for companies like Seagull. A federal tax credit and availability for grants to companies are very suitable supports for its involvement in workplace programs, however, options such as reducing wages during the training period or changing employee benefits do not seem to be viable options. As mentioned by the Human Resource Manager, "Although future funding for workplace educational initiative is a concern for this company, it will not deter us from meeting whatever upgrading need is present".

Factors Contributing to the Success of the Program

Throughout the interviews with program participants, there seemed to be a clear concensus as to what factors contributed to the success of the workplace upgrading program at Seagull Pewter. The three significant factors of company support, the expertise of the regional litracy facilitators and a customized curriculum were common themes which emerged.

Management support for the program was considered to be a major factor. Even before the initiative was launched in 1989, this medium-sized business had established a training culture with developmental opportunities for its employees. As the planning and implementation stages of the program took place, there was a dedicated and continual support from both owners and management. As was stated by the employees, "The company owners care".

A second factor contributing to program success was the availability of regional literacy facilitators from the Nova Scotia Department of Education to service the company. In this case, services such as the needs assessment, program design, curriculum development and program delivery were provided. This type of trained expertise was a key factor in Seagull Pewter's active participation in work place education.

Also important to the success in the program was the customized curriculum developed by the college instructor and in-house staff person. Each class was specificaly tailored to the particular needs of the work place using materials from the different sections. Related to this was the fact that the program was held at the work site which made child care easier to arrange for working mothers.

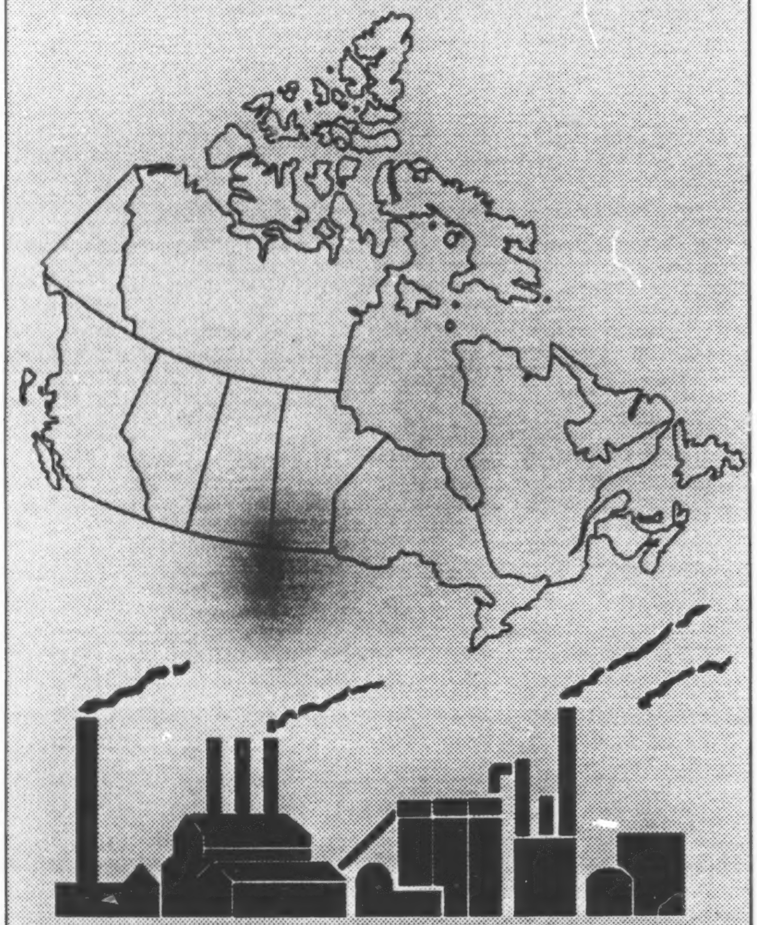
Advice to Others Planning Similar Programs

In response to the request for advice for others planning similar programs, participants were quite vocal and enthused.

- Make a big deal of the program. For example, hold a graduation ceremony and present gifts to all participants. It helps people come forward on their own.
- All companies should offer these kinds of programs because it's the only way many working people can upgrade their education. Attempts at home or in the community programs didn't feel as successful as here.
- Talk with other companies which have been involved with workplace programs. Become aware of potential pitfalls.
- Assess the needs of the workplace. Don't make the workplace upgrading solely a management effort.
- Avoid the term literacy. Present the program as you would any other training program and provide the same kinds of support such as paid release time and recognition.
- Don't think about it too long, just do it. Don't always look for returns. It's not always an issue of what the individual can do for the company, self-esteem is a key. If you can build upon that, then you will have more happy and contented people.

- Give employees a say in what they are interested in reading and writing.
- Be clear on what the program will offer to participants.
- If using tutors, recruit them from outside of the immediate work environment.
- Realize that the participants are adults and not school students.

Informing Our Practice



What Lessons Have We Learned?

Factors That Lead To Success In Workplace Literacy Programs

From the eight case studies included in this project, one can note a number of theme areas which primarily contribute to the success of workplace basic skills training programs. These might be grouped under the headings of:

- A Broader Perspective of Education and Learning
- A Combined Commitment
- Dynamic Organizational Structures
- Innovative Program Components
- Marketing and Recruitment
- Meaningful Support Services
- Funding Resources

The challenge is to be innovative in all of these theme areas.

A Broader Perspective of Education and Learning

Successful programs seem to perceive education and learning more holistically, viewing basic education in the workplace within its broader socio-economic, political, and educational context. Such programs are sometimes seen as a basic human right, seeing basic skills upgrading as more than an essential ingredient in adapting to increased trade competition. Individual needs within and beyond the workplace are combined with corporate needs, integrating these with basic and technical skills for workers. Thus, the programs which are offered see the relationship between the broader intent of education and the narrower focus of training.

It becomes clear that some understanding of the basic principles of the learning process and the philosophical orientation of adult education which guide these programs is required in creating, implementing and assessing these educational initiatives.

It also becomes clear that these programs are never just teaching subject-matter and content, nor just skills. They are also imparting values and attitudes, including communication and relational skills. Program objectives reflect this broader understanding of learning. In order to allow for interaction of program participants and the flexibility to meet needs, the process of the learning journey needs to be valued. This process and the product must complement each other.

Lastly, the workplace literacy programs go beyond seeing education as those activities which happen within the classroom. It also includes other essential components such as curriculum development, the recruiting of students, instructors, supervisors, and others to implement the program. An appropriate vocabulary reflects these approaches, including the terms: "facilitator" , "self-development," "learner--centred education," and all within the meaning of lifelong and continuous learning. All participants in, or associated with the program need to perceive themselves as learners.

A Combined Commitment

It is not enough that one group within the system be committed to the basic skills program. It is important that all parties are committed to all aspects of the program within the workplace, including all levels of management, workers, union, as well as those within and outside of the system who are in anyway supporting the program. Thus, each party actually feels some ownership of the program, advocates on its behalf, and guarantees a consistency of support.

The commitment is on action and to the implementation of all parts of the program. All parties become co-operative partners in the learning process thus helping to provide credibility to the program.

The key to commitment is participation and this is achieved within successful programs by: genuinely inviting people to express their suggestions and viewpoints; open communication; wide-spread input; being flexible, and reasonable feelings of equality. All participants, ideally, are dedicated, informed, and sensitive to listening to the opinions of others. Participation is a matter of choice.

Dynamic Organizational Structures

In many different ways, the eight case studies included in this report emphasized that successful programs greatly depended on an effective organization. Whatever the functional, collaborative and cooperative partnerships and structures that were created, it was important that these should represent the interests of all stakeholders. All the structures were intended to improve the coordination of activities, further enhance the feeling of ownership, solve problems, and overcome barriers to commitment and participation. They also provided added visibility and credibility to the program, monitored the implementation of the program, located and allocated resources, provided professional advice, as well as sustained a climate for learning.

Such organizational structures frequently go beyond the actual plant or industry where the educational program is offered. They may also involve others such as local training councils, or local school boards, especially if these agencies are providing support services to the program. These and other individuals and agencies also become supporters and advocates for the program. In all cases, these structures do not incidentally come into existence, but are seen as part of the program from the beginning and evolve accordingly and rationally.

Innovative Program Components

The core of any workplace literacy program is the actual teaching component which in turn is derived from appropriate and systematic on-going needs assessment. Participating in these assessments and establishing program goals can enhance commitment to the program and a feeling of satisfaction. Key ideas which characterize innovative programs include: flexibility, relevancy, self-paced learning, interaction, scheduling and location which accommodates workers, continuity, varied methodologies, an overall expression of collective goals, and a tailor-made curriculum in terms of assignments, instructional materials used and so on. There must also be an overall sensitivity to the progress made by individual workers so as to prevent people from being discouraged or dropping out.

The surroundings within which the program is taking place, to whatever extent possible, must not only be physically comfortable, but socially and psychologically comfortable as well. The case studies invariably emphasized that innovative programs are not necessarily a mattter of adapting existing programs. In some cases, new programs need to be conceptualized and created.

Marketing and Recruitment

Marketing, promotion, and recruitment relating to the program are to be seen as part of the learning process. Where possible, these should be on a personal contact basis, for example, recruiting workers for the program at the worksite. Many examples from the case studies emphasized the need to use several modes of communication such as word-of-mouth, newsletters, creative posters placed in strategic places, or annual reports. This principle applies, however, not just for locating workers, but for all other program participants, including managers, supervisors and instructors. A healthy team approach not only acknowledges the opinions of others but the accomplishments of others as well.

Meaningful Support Services

Many examples have been implied from the above of the need for appropriate and varied support services to sustain all aspects of the basic skills program. These might include the production of teaching materials, the training of people to perform specific tasks, the creative use of learning technologies, evaluation skills, counselling services or childcare services for working mothers. These varied services may come from within, or outside of the worksite, and usually includes a combination of both.

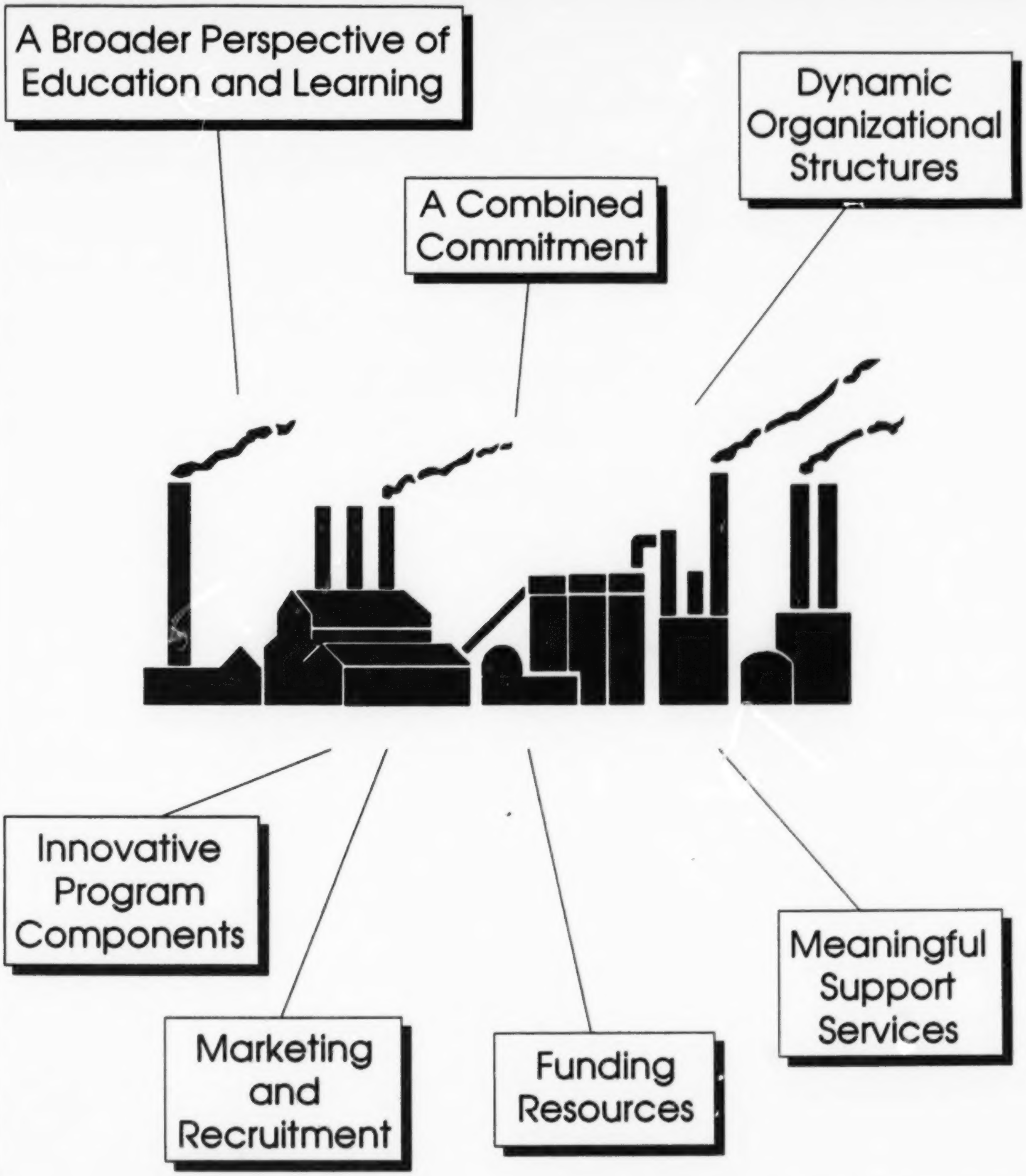
Funding Resources

Funding workplace programs is a resource that is essential. Although some participants commented on the limited implementation and maintenance costs for the programs, the case studies also spoke positively of the various forms of financial assistance that was available. Most case studies included multiple sources of funding, usually comprising the local industry itself, as well as municipal, provincial and federal contributions. The issue is not just the amount of money which is available, but how wisely and effectively these resources are being used.

A great deal of gratitude was expressed by the eight participating case studies for the availability of government funds in such forms as incentive grants, partnership funding and the joint partnership of industry, labour, education, and government. In addition to the other forms of support and leadership which governments can, and are making to basic educational programs in the workplace, is the catalytic role of the National Literacy Secretariat.

Appreciation was also expressed for funds that were available for start-up projects, since these can be more high-risk and unpredictable. Support from government for such pilots makes for an especially important contribution to the evolution of a longer term workplace educational program.

Factors Contributing to Program Success



A Broader Perspective of Education and Learning

A Combined Commitment

Dynamic Organizational Structures

Innovative Program Components

Marketing and Recruitment

Funding Resources

Meaningful Support Services

Advice To Others Planning Similar Programs

Each program participant interviewed was asked to offer some advice, especially to those who were thinking of starting up comparable educational programs within the workplace. Although many detailed examples and suggestions were given, there seem to be six major thoughts for consideration, as summarized below.

A Program Grounded in a Philosophy of Practice

Any workplace literacy program needs to have a philosophy to which management and other participants are genuinely committed. Illustrations of such values would be the importance of treating people with respect, with dignity, and as adults; enhancing human contact and creating a learning culture within the workplace; perceiving the educational program as one that is integral to the company; avoiding giving it negative labels; and thinking of the program as a continuing educational one. Also, it is important not to unduly dwell on the predetermined outcomes of the program which exclusively serve the interests of the company. It is essential to see the program as an opportunity for employees to take part in their own self-development, valuing the feelings of self-esteem which people get from the program. The values expressed through a program and company philosophy needs to be learner-centred.

Being Responsible and Responsive

In being responsible, it is important to take the time to do the thorough planning that is required to develop a responsive program. For example, planning is required in undertaking a literacy task analysis and needs assessment; in individualizing the program; in responding to the needs of all participants and stakeholders including the convenient scheduling of courses; and in carrying out the multitude of other tasks that need to be done, such as selecting a suitable site for the program, matching tutors and workers, securing instructors, and developing a curriculum. This is to say that, careful and detailed planning enhances successful programs and mutual feelings of satisfaction with it.

Participation and Partnerships

A key concept to successful literacy programs in the workplace is "participation," as expressed through establishing joint partnerships; in involving all participants in all aspects of the program; making the program open to anyone who wants to participate; in offering choices, and allowing participants to identify and address their perceived needs. Participation must be genuine, not patronizing, involving people in actual decision-making.

Communication and Trust

The case studies especially emphasized the importance of trust and communication among all those associated with the educational program, and sometimes communication structures have to be created, along with the program itself. One cannot assume that communication will naturally occur, but it is important to work on making it happen, so that close collaboration between workers and mangement really does happen. Ways to achieve this would be to have regular meetings to discuss the program; having workers understand the intended benefits which arise from the program without being coerced into it; regular monitoring and evaluation; making sure that even those who are not directly involved in the program are informed about it; and having orientation sessions. Good communication can advocate and publicize the educational program, and is part of recognizing the achievements of the participants in the program. Communication can be extended by making an effort to learn from the experiences of others, including other companies who have similar programs. It is important that everyone who wishes to do so has an input into the program, and is seriously listened to.

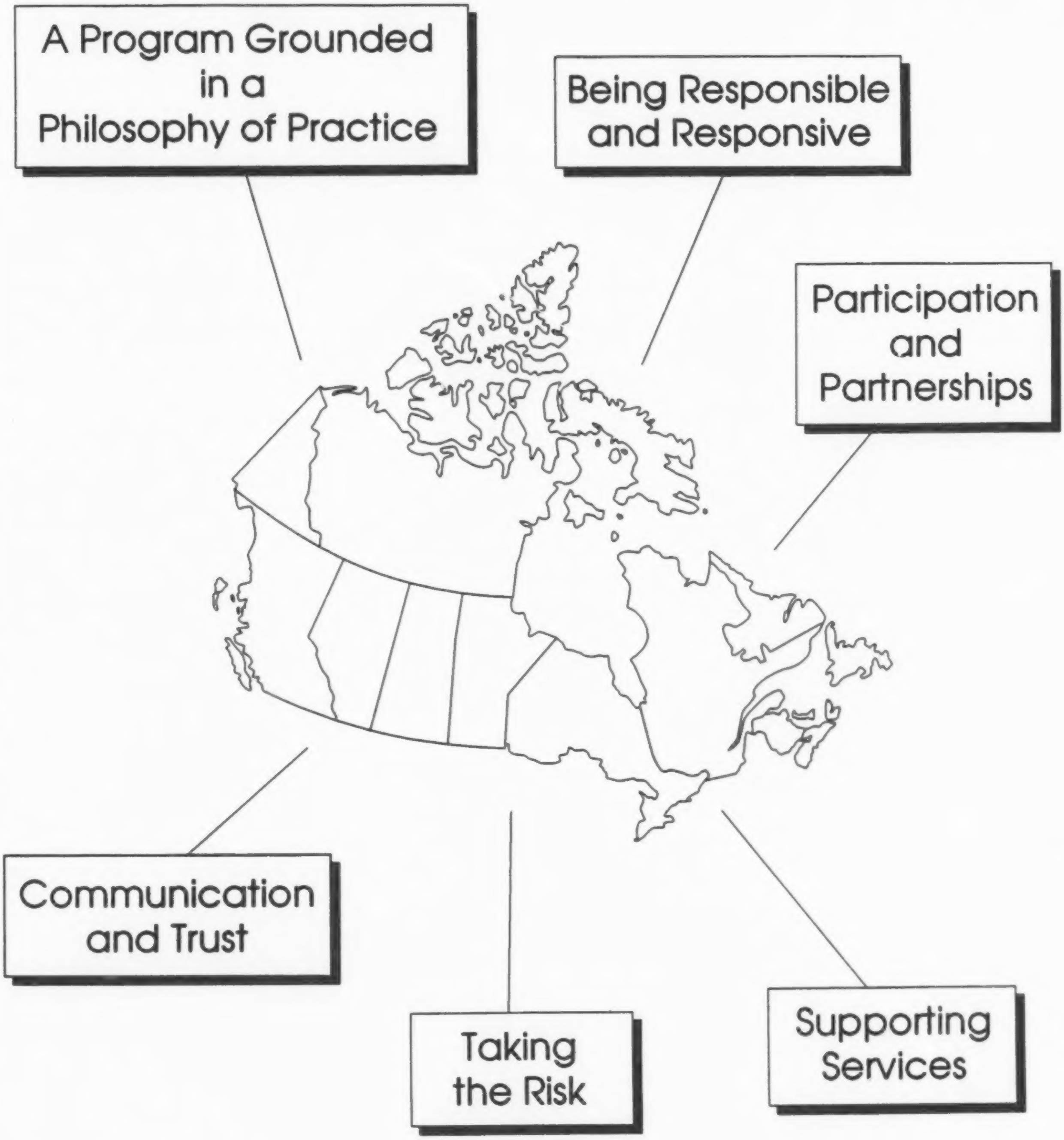
Supporting Services

By understanding the barriers which might prevent workers from participating in the program, it is possible to have built-in support services to the program such as tutoring, counselling, referrals, and day-care services, often within the worksite.

Taking The Risk

Wisely, some of the case studies offered the advice that there is often no absolute answers. That the developmental process is one of experimentation. If educational progams within the workplace are really responsive then they will be unique in many ways. Therefore, program models from elsewhere will be approximate only. What is important however, is to periodically reflect on what is happening in the planning process and be open to modify the direction of the planning if necessary. Being flexible is a key factor for success.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program



A Program Grounded in a Philosophy of Practice

Being Responsible and Responsive

Participation and Partnerships

Communication and Trust

Taking the Risk

Supporting Services

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